

By endurance we conquer

Ernest Shackleton's family motto

The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition

1914 - 1917

Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition began as a voyage of exploration and became an outstanding story of survival in the world's most hostile environment. The aim of the expedition was to make the first coast to coast crossing of Antarctica. It was a perilous journey of 1,800 miles, and involved two ships and more than fifty men.

Plan

	Page
1. Shackleton's Planned Expedition – Funding – Expedition	1
2. Expedition Members and Crew	2
3. Departing London – 1 August 1914	2
4. <i>Endurance</i> trapped in pack ice – 18 January 1915	3
5. Living on board <i>Endurance</i> for 9 months	4
6. <i>Endurance</i> crushed and sinking – "Ocean Camp" – "Patience Camp". Three lifeboats set off for Elephant Island	5
7. Landing on Elephant Island – "Camp Wild"	6
8. Preparing the <i>James Caird</i> for journey to South Georgia. South Georgia	7
9. Punta Arenas in Chile. Rescue from Elephant Island by the Chilean Navy	7
10. Ross Sea Party Rescue	8
11. Conclusion	8



Endurance trapped in pack ice



Ernest Shackleton with the *Endurance*

Funding

While Shackleton had secured funding of £10,000 from the British Government, scientific objectives were now a requirement for such funding and he told a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society that in addition, "there is no one individual who does not want the British flag to be the first flag ever carried across the frozen waste".

With the First World War only months away, flag-waving patriotism was essential to get Government funding and private donors on board. Shackleton had a keen appreciation of what the public wanted and was eager to provide it. In his fundraising appeal, Shackleton held out the prospect of making both geographic and scientific discoveries, thereby carefully combining the English public's demand for spectacle with the more serious-minded scientific purpose that would satisfy those who demanded a practical return for their contributions. He received several additional donations including two large donations of £24,000 from the Scottish textile manufacturer Sir James Caird and £10,000 from English businessman Dudley Docker.

Expedition

There would be two ships, the *SS Endurance* (a new Norwegian ship originally built for tourist trips in the Arctic) which would set out from England and the *SY Aurora* (the Australian explorer Mawson's old ship) which would set out from Hobart in Tasmania.

Shackleton planned to have the *Endurance* put fourteen members of the expedition ashore at Vahsel Bay in the Weddell Sea and he would then set out from there with five companions on the 1,800 mile transcontinental sledge journey, while the other eight would set out in a different direction to explore the immediate region.

On the other side of the continent, the *Aurora* would land six men on the shores of the Ross Sea to lay food depots along the final part of Shackleton's planned route.

Shackleton envisaged his triumphant return to England in April 1915 with the men from the Expedition returning a year later.

Centenary Expedition 2014 following the planned route of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition—1914

1. Shackleton's Planned Expedition

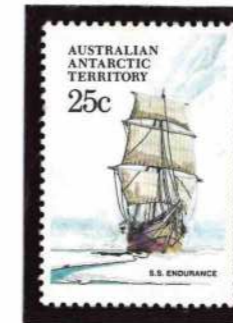
Ernest Shackleton wrote in "The Times" on 29 December 1913

It has been an open secret for some time past that I have been desirous of leading another expedition to the South Polar regions. I am glad now to be able to state that an expedition will start next year with the object of crossing the South Polar continent from sea to sea.

Shackleton then went public with his plans announcing that "The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition" would be established to cross the continent.



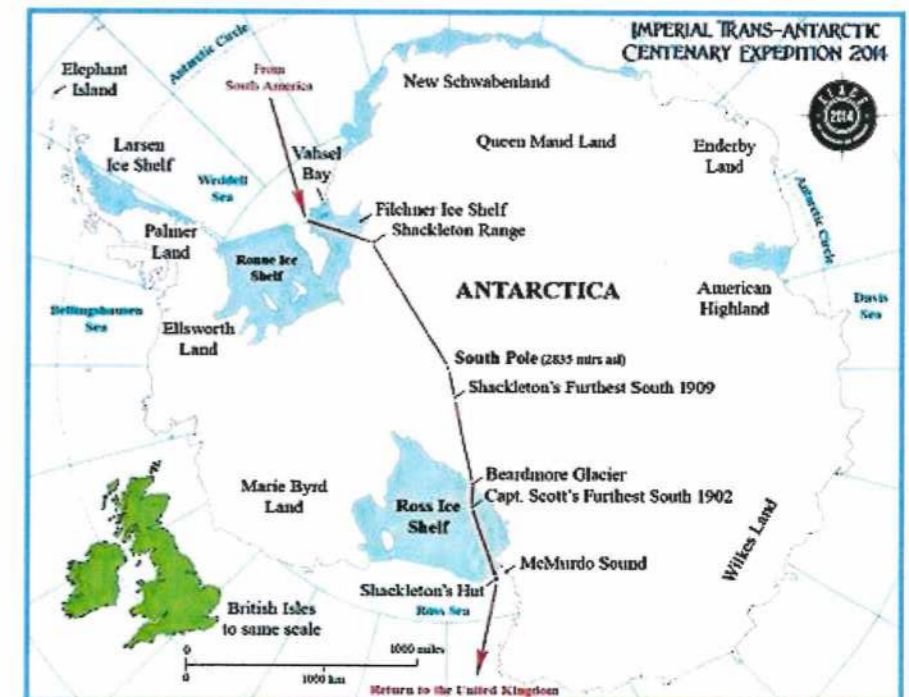
Lord Curzon—President Royal Geographical Society 1911—1913



SS Endurance



SY Aurora



2. Expedition Members and Crew

The expedition members with Antarctic experience were Shackleton's second-in-command Frank Wild, artist George Marston, photographer Frank Hurley, Tom Crean and Alf Cheetham. The captain, Frank Worsley, was a very experienced captain with excellent navigation skills. Eventually the members of the expedition also included two surgeons, two scientists, seamen, engineers, a carpenter and a stowaway. Three members of the Ross Sea party had had Antarctic experience.

More than five thousand men and boys (and three girls) answered the advert in the Times. The *Endeavour* eventually had a total of 28 members on board.



Frank Hurley—photographer on Mawson's Expedition



Thomas "Tom" Crean—served under Scott on both Discovery and Terra Nova



James Wordie—Chief Scientist of the Expedition and Geologist. He donated to the expedition and kept detailed scientific records as well as records of day to day events including the food that was eaten and its calorific value.



Members and crew aboard *Endurance* at the start of the expedition

day last, it was directed to Mr. ROBERT Harrison, No. 34 Baker st.
EDWARD HUGHES, 41 Fish st.
MEN WANTED
 for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful, honor and recognition in event of success.
 Ernest Shackleton 4 Burlington st.
MEN— Neat-appearing young men of pleasing personality, between ages of 21 to 40 to work at leathersho.com.

copy

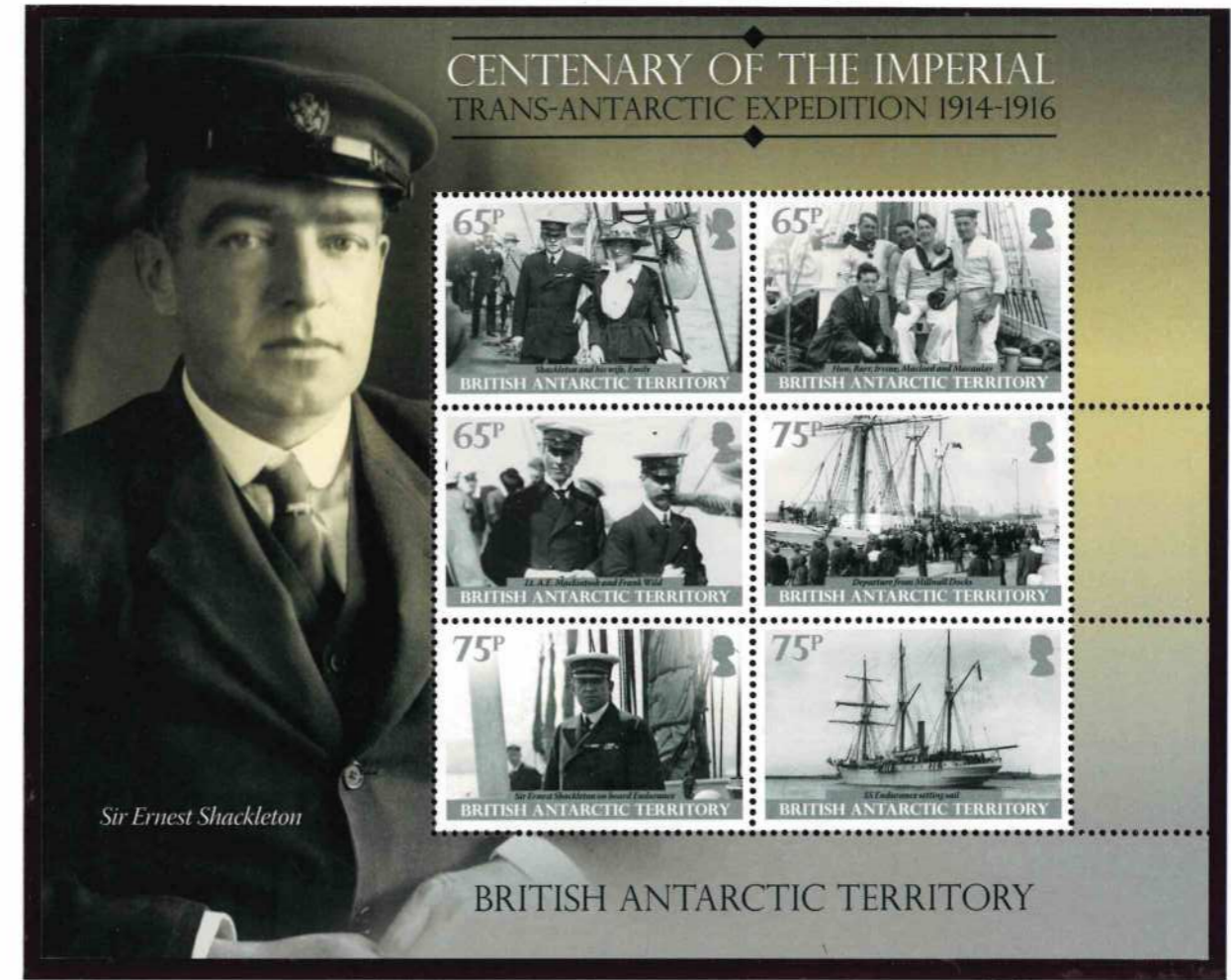
Advert placed in the Times by Ernest Shackleton



The upper deck of *Endurance* where the dog kennels were located - there were 69 dogs in all.

Endurance sailed from London on 1 August 1914 but while still in British waters the general mobilisation of troops was announced in anticipation of the coming First World War. In a grand gesture Shackleton offered the ship, men and provisions to the government for the war effort. The First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, who had described the Expedition as a "sterile quest", declined the offer. While three members of the team felt it was their duty to stay, the rest continued south - except for Shackleton who later joined his ship in Buenos Aires after having dealt with financial matters in London.

3. Departing London—1 August 1914



Sir Ernest Shackleton

BRITISH ANTARCTIC TERRITORY

- Shackleton and his wife, Emily
- Lt. A F Mackintosh and Frank Wild
- Sir Ernest Shackleton on board *Endurance*
- How, Barr, Irvine, Macleod and Macaulay
- Departure from Millwall Docks
- *SS Endurance* setting sail



King George V and Queen Mary (1910—1935)



Winston Churchill First Lord of the Admiralty - 1914



Royal Farewell—Shackleton, standing by HM Queen Alexandra, leads a hearty cheer.

Shackleton received a measure of Royal support: King George V presented him with a Union Jack to be raised over any new territory he might cross and Queen Alexandra gave him an inscribed bible.

4. Endurance trapped in pack ice – 18 January 1915



Endurance in full sail



Entering the Antarctic ice December 1914

Endurance frozen in pack ice January 1915



Ernest Shackleton with Endurance



Endurance in pack ice



Endurance in the Weddell Sea—June 1915

Alexander Macklin, one of the ship's two surgeons wrote in his diary :

"It was more than tantalizing, it was maddening. Shackleton at this time showed one of his sparks of real greatness. He did not rage at all, or show outwardly the slightest sign of disappointment: he told us simply and calmly that we must winter in the Pack, explained its dangers and possibilities; never lost his optimism, and prepared for Winter."



The dogs were removed from the decks and housed in "dogloos" on the ice

In October 1914 Shackleton joined the *Endurance* in Buenos Aires and continued to the whaling port of Grytviken on the northern coast of South Georgia. They advised him to delay his departure as the pack ice was unusually heavy and was drifting farther north. Shackleton delayed his departure for more than a month – making improvements to the ship, training sledge dogs and laying in additional stores. *Endurance* finally sailed for the Weddell Sea on 5 December 1914. The pack ice was much further north than usual and for six weeks the ship made slow progress south as she dodged around or forced her way through heavy ice.

The Antarctic coast of Coats Land was sighted on 10 January 1915 and Shackleton briefly thought of landing at Glacier Bay but decided to stick to his original plan and head to Vahsel Bay. Not far from their destination the ice closed tightly around the ship and with the temperature beginning to drop the ship was in its grip.

Endurance drifted at the mercy of the ice floe and on 22 February reached the 77th parallel – her furthest south – and then drifted west away from her intended destination.

The interior of the ship was converted into more comfortable winter quarters and Shackleton kept his men busy with regular duties, training the dogs and other activities and entertainment. They celebrated Empire Day on 24 May singing patriotic songs and telling each other that the might of the Empire would quickly prevail against the Kaiser. On 15 June they held an Antarctic Derby and all 28 men had a bet on which of the four dog teams entered would win the 700 yard race. The wagers were ones laid in cigarettes and chocolates. Football and hockey games were also regularly played on the fields of ice until daylight eventually faded for the winter months.



Attempts to cut a passage through the ice floe proved fruitless

Football match



5. Living on board *Endurance* for 9 months

The scientists turned their land-based research into a sea-based programme.

The man least affected by the turn of events was photographer Frank Hurley, who was ready for anything the Antarctic could throw at him.

Frank Worsley wrote –

“Hurley is a marvel, he perambulates alone, aloft and everywhere, in the most dangerous and slippery places he can find, content & happy at all times but cursing so if he can get a good or novel picture. Stands bare, hair waving in the wind, where we are gloved & helmeted, he snaps his snaps or winds his handle turning out curses of delight.”

With the freezing Antarctic winter setting in when the temperature plummeted to below freezing and the sun disappeared for over four months, the crew settled in to daily chores and the evenings passed with games of cards, chess and billiards. Some members wrote diaries and others held gramophone concerts or lectures. The highlight of the day was always the hearty dinner.



Frank Worsley and James Wordie taking astronomical observations during the winter.



Frank Hurley taking photographs



Tom Crean and Pups

The pups and the cat had to be shot once they left the ship—the realistic Shackleton knew they could not afford to carry anyone who could not contribute.



The menacing Killer Whales

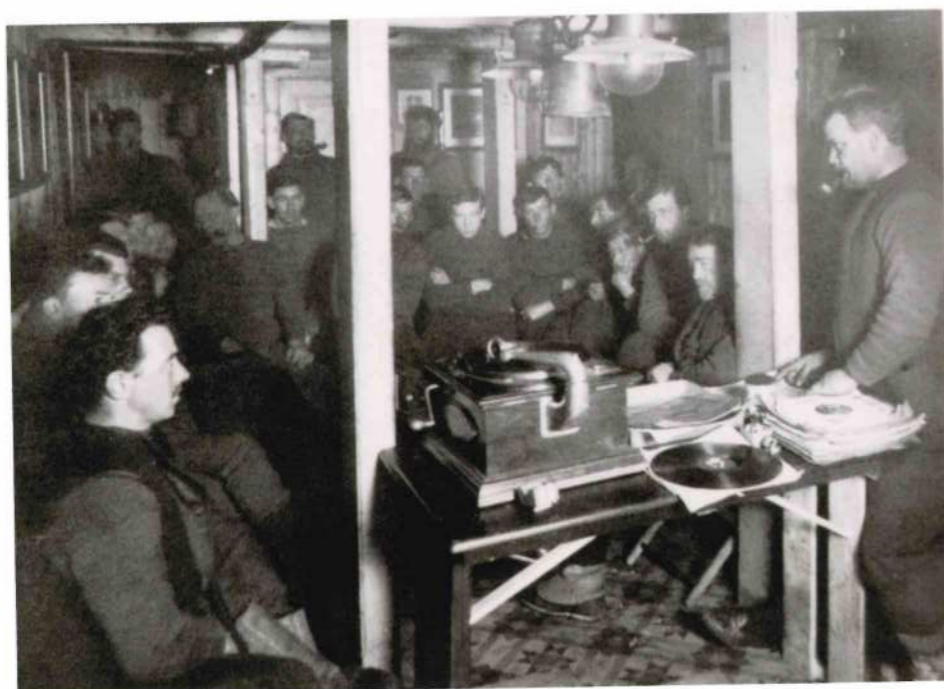


Perce Blackborow (stowaway from Wales) with Mrs Chippy—carpenter Harry McNish's cat which became the ship's mascot

A killer whale would show a lizard-like head beside a floe, spot a resting seal, dive, then smash through the ice, seizing the seal in its formidable teeth. The creatures were enormously powerful. When the photographer Frank Hurley was taking a dog team over the thin ice, he heard whales blowing behind him and dashed for solid ice.

Frank Hurley

“No need to shout “mush” and swing the lash. The whip of terror had cracked over their heads and they flew before it. The whales behind ... broke through the thin ice as though it was tissue paper, and I fancy, were so staggered by the strange sight that met their eyes, that for a moment they hesitated. Had they gone ahead and attacked us in front, our chances of escape would have been slim indeed Never in my life have I looked upon more loathsome creatures.”



George Marston stands next to the gramophone and a pile of 78 rpm records during a regular Sunday evening concert.



James Wordie, Alf Cheetham and Alexander Macklin, participate in the most menial of ship's tasks: scrubbing the floor

**6. Endurance crushed and sinking. "Ocean Camp". "Patience Camp".
Three lifeboats set off for Elephant Island.**

Throughout the winter *Endurance* continued to drift on the gyrating ice floe in a roughly clockwise direction. In the middle of July the ship was struck by a 70 mile per hour blizzard, after which the pressure of the ice surrounding her increased. In the following months the ship groaned, beams were twisted, door frames thrown out of alignment and the wooden braces were dislodged. The ship began to shake furiously and list to one side. Water poured in through the damaged sternpost and despite firing the engines to drive the pumps which worked night and day, the water continued to rise. On the evening of 27 October 1915 Shackleton gave the order to abandon ship.

Endurance was no longer safe and on 21 November 1915 her bow dipped, her stern raised in the air, and she slipped beneath the ice.

"Ocean Camp" (30 October to 23 December 1915)

A new living site known as "Ocean Camp" was eventually set up on a thick heavy ice floe about 1.5 miles from the wrecked ship. The intention was to wait for the break-up of the ice and to launch the three lifeboats, the *James Caird*, the *Dudley Docker* and the *Stancomb Wills*, into open water and head for Paulet Island. In the following weeks huge amounts of material were salvaged from the ship and the area around it including the three lifeboats, containers of food and other materials including to build a kitchen. Hurley had dived into four feet of mushy ice to retrieve the 120 negatives that he and Shackleton judged to be the best of the more than 500 images already taken. These negatives had luckily been soldered in tin containers.

They remained in Ocean Camp for approximately a month and noticed that they were drifting further away from potential safety so decided to move to a new location.



The *Endurance* keels over as a result of a pressure wave in the sea below the ice.



Man-hauling the *James Caird*

"Patience Camp" (29 December 1915)

Continually dragging the boats and supplies was back-breaking and resulted in an average gain of little more than a mile – many of the men harboured doubts and resentment about the decision and the slow progress. Harry McNish (who was still aggrieved over the loss of his cat) became very abusive and said with the sinking of the *Endurance* they no longer had to obey orders.

Shackleton promptly mustered all hands and read aloud the ship's articles which, according to him, kept them under his command for the duration of the expedition. Although on the surface he had won the argument he was evidently swayed by the incident and after two days established a new camp which they called Patience Camp. While at Patience Camp they drifted past their original target of Paulet Island and Shackleton decided on Elephant Island as his new target.



Frank Wild surveys the wreck of the *Endurance*

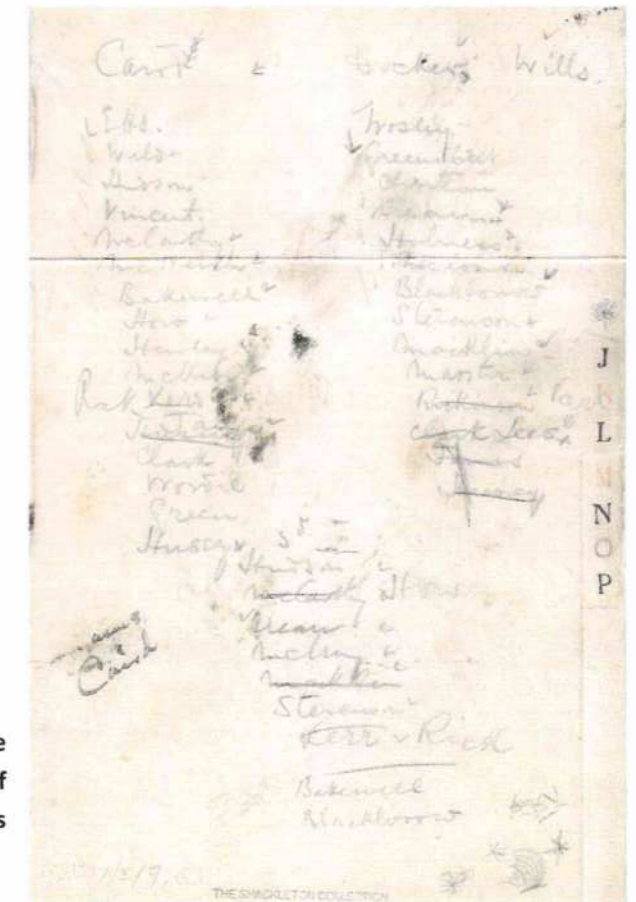


Ocean Camp established on the sea ice about 1.5 miles from the stricken ship



Frank Hurley and Shackleton, Patience Camp

Shackleton's handwritten note with details of the allocation of crews for the three lifeboats bound for Elephant Island



copy

Three lifeboats set off for Elephant Island

The party remained at Patience Camp for about three months. On 9 April 1916 when the ice had finally broken up enough to allow them into the boats, the expedition set sail between ice floes and into stormy seas. For six days the men huddled in the small boats, cramped and constantly soaked by freezing water while suffering from thirst, hunger and seasickness. Shackleton and Frank Worsley drove them on.

They arrived at Elephant Island on 15 April 1916



Endurance trapped in ice—crushed 27 October sank 21 November, 1915



Shackleton and Frank Wild at Ocean Camp



Ocean Camp

7 **Landing on Elephant Island - "Camp Wild"**



The three lifeboats being pulled onto the rocky beach named Cape Valentine. The steep cliffs were obviously an area that would be battered by rough seas and not safe. They set up a camp the following day which they called "Camp Wild".



"Camp Wild" copy



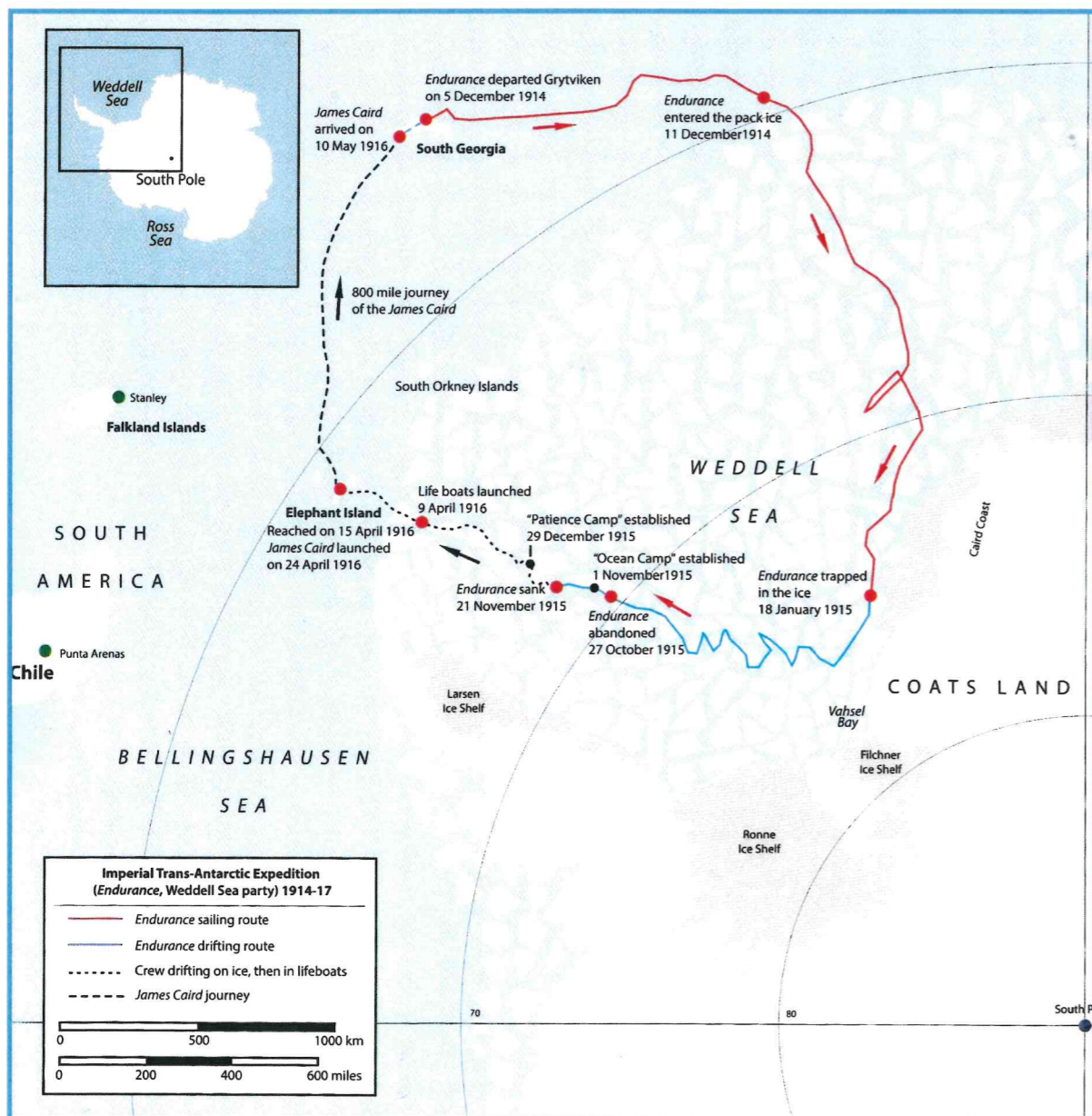
"A member of the 1971 Joint Services Expedition holds up a copy of Hurley's photograph against the landing site on Elephant Island."

Frank Wild managed to hold together this party of 22 men who eventually spent 137 days on Elephant Island. After the journey to Elephant Island supplies were low and many of the men were suffering from mental and other health problems. These were dealt with by the two surgeons, Alexander Macklin and Jim McIlroy.

Food was getting short by the beginning of August and they started digging up discarded seal bones and stewing them in sea water but found seaweed boiled in sea water to be very tasty. They celebrated mid-winter's day with a cocktail made with a pint of hot water, ginger, sugar and a teaspoon of methylated spirits. They finished the methylated spirits on 12 August 1916 and thereafter toasted their sweethearts, the men aboard the *James Caird* on their rescue voyage and the King, with hot water and ginger.



A number of men having their initial meal on Elephant Island. It was their first on solid ground after 497 days on the ice.



copy

The banjo that was salvaged from the *Endurance* was a tonic. At Saturday night concerts the men accompanied by the banjo would sing vulgar and vivid songs about each other's appearance, habits and characters. If a man was hurt he avenged himself with a song about the songwriter the next Saturday. Hurley had also salvaged volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and several packs of playing cards as protection against one of the worst of enemies – boredom. Huge imaginary fortunes changed hands at poker. They consumed hours arguing vigorously about the details of life in ancient Egypt and in Park Avenue, New York. The encyclopaedia was a balm for the mind as well as the body. Its saltpetre-treated pages were fine pipe lighters and worked well as cigarette papers.



Digging a cave for shelter



Hut on Elephant Island



copy

The above sketch depicts the men's sparse living conditions inside the upturned boats on Elephant Island. One of the top bunks was given to Lewis Rickensen who had suffered a heart attack on the journey to Elephant Island as it was warmer for him above the stove.



Frank Wild decided to make a hut from the two remaining boats and scraps of old tents. They erected parallel stone walls to support the bow and stern of the two boats laid side by side, stretched sails and tent floor cloths over the upturned hulls and fastened tent canvas to act as walls. They installed a blubber stove between the boats and used a biscuit tin as a chimney.

8. Preparing the *James Caird* for the journey to South Georgia. South Georgia.

Alexander Macklin wrote -

“Shackleton sitting still and doing nothing wasn’t Shackleton at all. We’d had all that at Patience Camp.”

Shackleton was determined to go for help to South Georgia 800 nautical miles away across the most dangerous seas on earth. In the following days Harry McNish carried out extensive carpentry work on the *James Caird* including stiffening the keel, adding an extra mast and overseeing the construction of a canvas decking to protect its interior. Shackleton selected five companions for the voyage – Frank Worsley, who was an exceptionally skilled navigator; Tom Crean, who had consistently proved his stamina and value, Tim McCarthy, a seaman, Harry McNish and John Vincent. The latter two were taken so that Shackleton could keep his eye on them – Harry McNish was an obvious malcontent and John Vincent’s bullying had been a problem.



Launching *James Caird* from Elephant Island—24 April 1916



South Georgia

The six men left on 24 April 1916, heading north to clear the pack ice and then turning east towards South Georgia. For the next two weeks the small boat was buffeted by gales and mountainous seas including one giant wave that nearly swamped her. There was little protection from icy water which soaked the men and their sleeping bags below. The freezing conditions meant the boat was soon covered with ice and the undernourished men had to chip away at this while desperately holding on. The weather made it difficult for Worsley to navigate but after 15 days they sighted South Georgia. They were unable to land for two days but they finally found a landing place which they named “Peggotty Camp”.



Shackleton, Crean and Worsley crossing South Georgia



The uncharted mountains of South Georgia



James Caird—voyage to South Georgia
24 April to 10th May 1916



Stromness whaling station—South Georgia

9. Punta Arenas in Chile – Rescue from Elephant Island by the Chilean Navy



Piloto Pardo and the crew of the Chilean Navy vessel *Yelcho*



Piloto Luis Pardo



Sir Ernest Shackleton with the Chilean steamer *Yelcho*

Shackleton, having organised a passage back to England for McNish, Vincent and McCarthy, made two attempts to rescue the men at Elephant Island without success. Shackleton, Worsley and Crean then travelled to Punta Arenas in Chile where, with contributions from local residents in Chile, he chartered a schooner but 90 miles north of Elephant Island the engine broke down. Finally, the Chilean Government agreed to send down the steel tug *Yelcho* under the command of Luis Pardo.

On 30 August 1916, after 137 days on Elephant Island, the men were ferried to the *Yelcho* and taken to Punta Arenas. All 22 men were brought back to safety and returned to England.

Ernest Shackleton –

“Finally, it was the Chilean Government that was directly responsible for the rescue of my comrades. This southern Republic was unwearied in its efforts to make a successful rescue, and the gratitude of our whole party is due to them. I especially mention the sympathetic attitude of Admiral Muñoz Hurtado, head of the Chilean Navy, and Captain Luis Pardo, who commanded the *Yelcho* on our last and successful venture.”



Rescue vessel *Yelcho* can be seen on the horizon



Yelcho arriving back in Punta Arenas, Chile

10 Ross Sea Party Rescue



Nine of the Ross Sea Party aboard *Aurora* copy

In September 1914 the second part of Shackleton's Trans-Antarctic expedition left London for Sydney to join the *Aurora* which was waiting in Hobart, Tasmania. They set out from Hobart for the Ross Sea which they reached in January 1915. Under the command of Aeneas Mackintosh they were to establish depots for the crossing party leaving Vahsel Bay under the command of Shackleton. The Ross Sea Party had been poorly organised and equipped from the beginning. Mackintosh placed his first officer, John Stenhouse, in charge of the *Aurora* and intended to use the ship as a main living quarters and large quantities of food and clothing were never landed.

Aurora broke loose from her moorings in early May due to a violent storm and was firmly held in a large ice floe in the McMurdo Sound. For nine months with her engines out of commission she drifted in the ice until the ice broke up and she was able to reach New Zealand. Stenhouse attempted to organise a relief expedition but with-out success.

The land party consisting of ten men began sledging oil and food from Cape Evans to Hut Point and then on to the Barrier to establish initial depots for the crossing party. These ten men were in desperate straits and after wintering at Cape Evans where they used supplies left by Scott's expedition, nine of them resumed depot laying three of whom had to return to base in January 1916 due to a faulty primus. Later that month the other six had laid depots all the way to Mount Hope at the base of the Beardmore Glacier. They continued to lay these depots unaware that *Endurance* was also held in ice floes in the Weddell Sea causing the expedition to be cancelled.

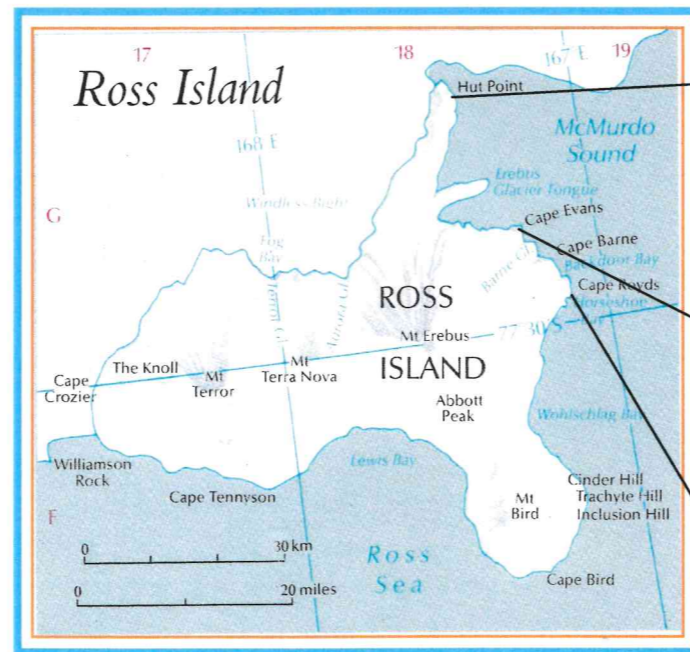
With only four dogs left, little progress was made man-hauling and they relied heavily on the dogs. Rev. Spencer-Smith, who had been suffering from scurvy, died on the return trip and Mackintosh also became ill. The five men struggled back to Hut Point in March where they were forced to wait for the sea to freeze before crossing to Cape Evans. In early May, Macintosh and Hayward immediately headed for Cape Evans despite the knowledge that the sea ice was still unstable. A blizzard blew in shortly after this and the two were never seen again. Not until July were the remaining three men able to return to Cape Evans to be reunited with the four already there.



Ernest Wild (brother of Frank Wild) and E.E.M. Joyce in the hut at Cape Evans. As food and clothing had been left on *Aurora*, they were forced to eat food left by Scott's expedition and make boots from seal skins found in the hut.



Seven of the ten men who survived being marooned ashore on Ross Island after the disappearance of the *Aurora*.



copy



Hut Point



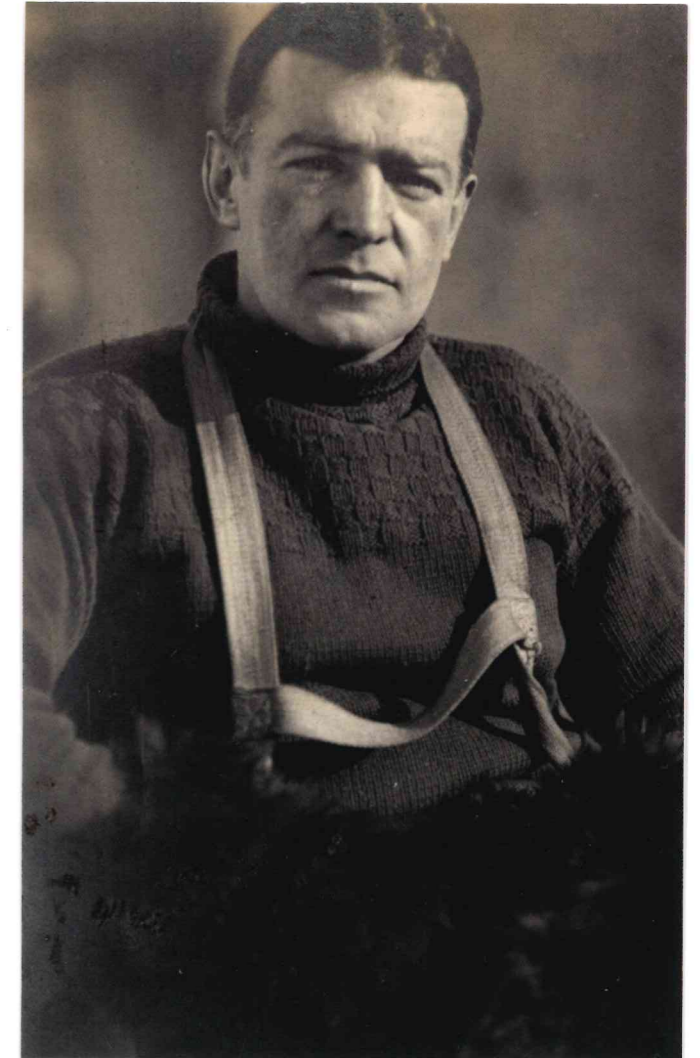
Scott's Hut at Cape Evans

Aurora—arrived at Cape Royds on 10 January 1917 to pick up the survivors of the Ross Sea Party

The British, Australian and New Zealand governments finally reluctantly decided to arrange a rescue but wanted Shackleton to have no part in this. *Aurora* was repaired, refitted and placed under the command of John King Davis who was well known to Shackleton and was willing to have him on board. *Aurora* progressed rapidly south arriving at Shackleton's old base at Cape Royds on 10 January 1917. While the relief party went ashore the seven surviving members of the Ross Sea Party arrived unexpectedly. Following a thorough but unsuccessful search for Mackintosh and Hayward the ship turned north.

With *Aurora's* arrival at Wellington on 9 February 1917, the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition officially ended.

11 Conclusion



Sir Ernest Shackleton

In many senses the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition was a failure. Not only had none of its geographical or scientific goals been attained but a ship and three men had been lost, along with most of the scientific specimens. And yet the manner in which Shackleton held his party together on the ice and then proceeded to rescue them via one of the most astonishing open-boat voyages in history and a remarkable crossing of South Georgia made not only an epic tale of adventure but earned Shackleton recognition as one of the greatest leaders in the history of exploration.

