

## SCOTT OF THE ANTARCTIC

advance in geographic knowledge, a march that would take him nearer to the Pole than men had ever been.

Five sledges bore a total load of 1,850 lb.: nine weeks' supply of food for men and dogs, plus clothing, cooking equipment, skis, tools and a tent. Extra provisions laid at a depot by a supporting party would see them through a further four weeks, if necessary.

There were no illusions about what lay before them. Wilson's diary, kept for his wife, shows it. 'If anything happens to me so that you can't see me again in this life, and you want to hear about me from those who do get home, will you please make a point of seeing the Captain and Royds in preference to anyone else. . . . Don't give way to despair.'

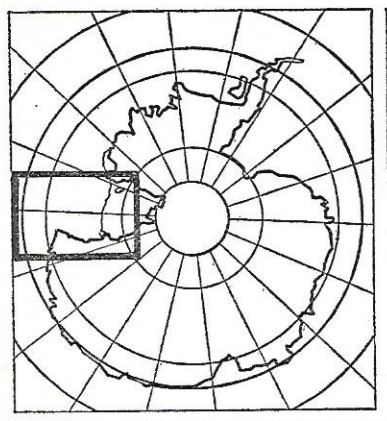
Shackleton left a letter to the young woman whom he wished to marry. 'Beloved I hope you may never have to read this but darling loved one if it comes to you you will know that your lover left this world with all his heart yours. . . .'

Scott's mood was laconically expressed in a diary note: 'We have just been gazing with anxious eyes on the road to the south.' A champagne party was held in the wardroom on the night of 1 November, 1902. The following day, he wrote: 'We are off at last.' With Wilson and Shackleton and a team of nineteen dogs, he set out on the great sledge journey that inaugurated what has since been flamboyantly described as 'the heroic age of Antarctic exploration'.

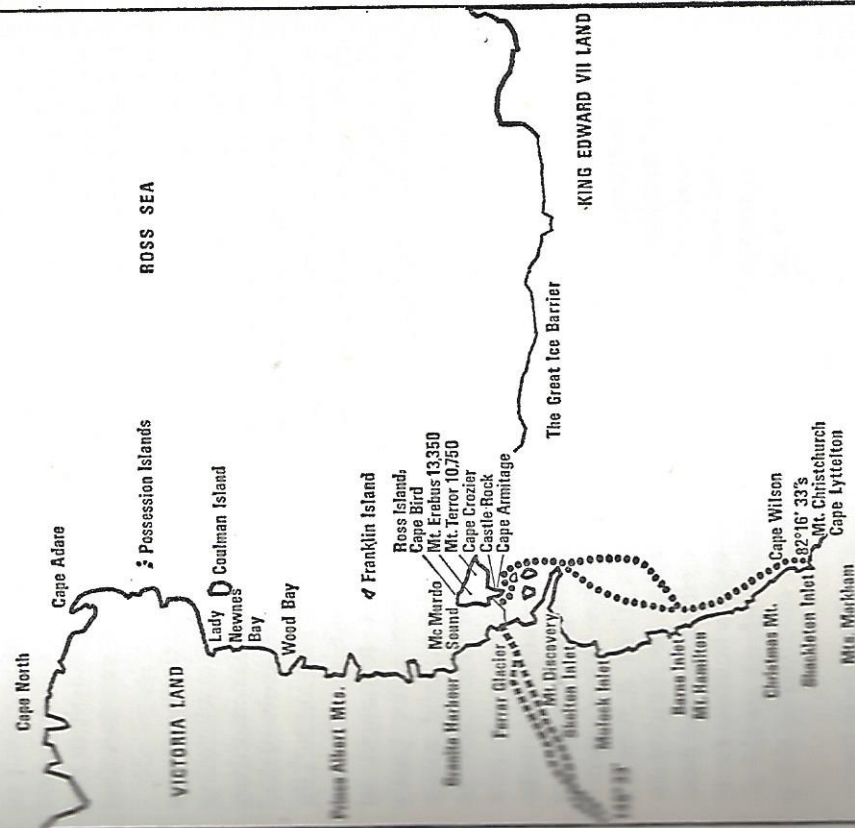
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Scott originally meant to make the southward thrust with only one companion. It would have saved weight and food. Wilson argued him out of it by emphasizing the hazards of an unknown terrain and the risk of sickness, in which event the burden might prove to be too heavy for one man alone. Scott then agreed that the party should consist of Shackleton, Barne and himself. Severe frost-bite put Barne out of the running. Wilson was asked to take his place. He welcomed the chance.

As a medical man, he had private doubts about Shackleton's stamina. 'For some reason, I don't think he is fitted for the job. The Captain is strong and hard as a bulldog, but Shackleton



Captain Scott's southern journey .....  
 Captain Scott's western journey .....





It was an all too brief respite from anxiety, which was renewed in full measure by the rapidly falling temperature. By the last day of February it was minus 37 degrees, a drastic change for weakened men to endure. The pulling became exhausting, and not only by reason of the bad surface which had no glide on it. Apart from the small supplementary ration of pony meat, their food was deficient in vitamins and calorie values.\*

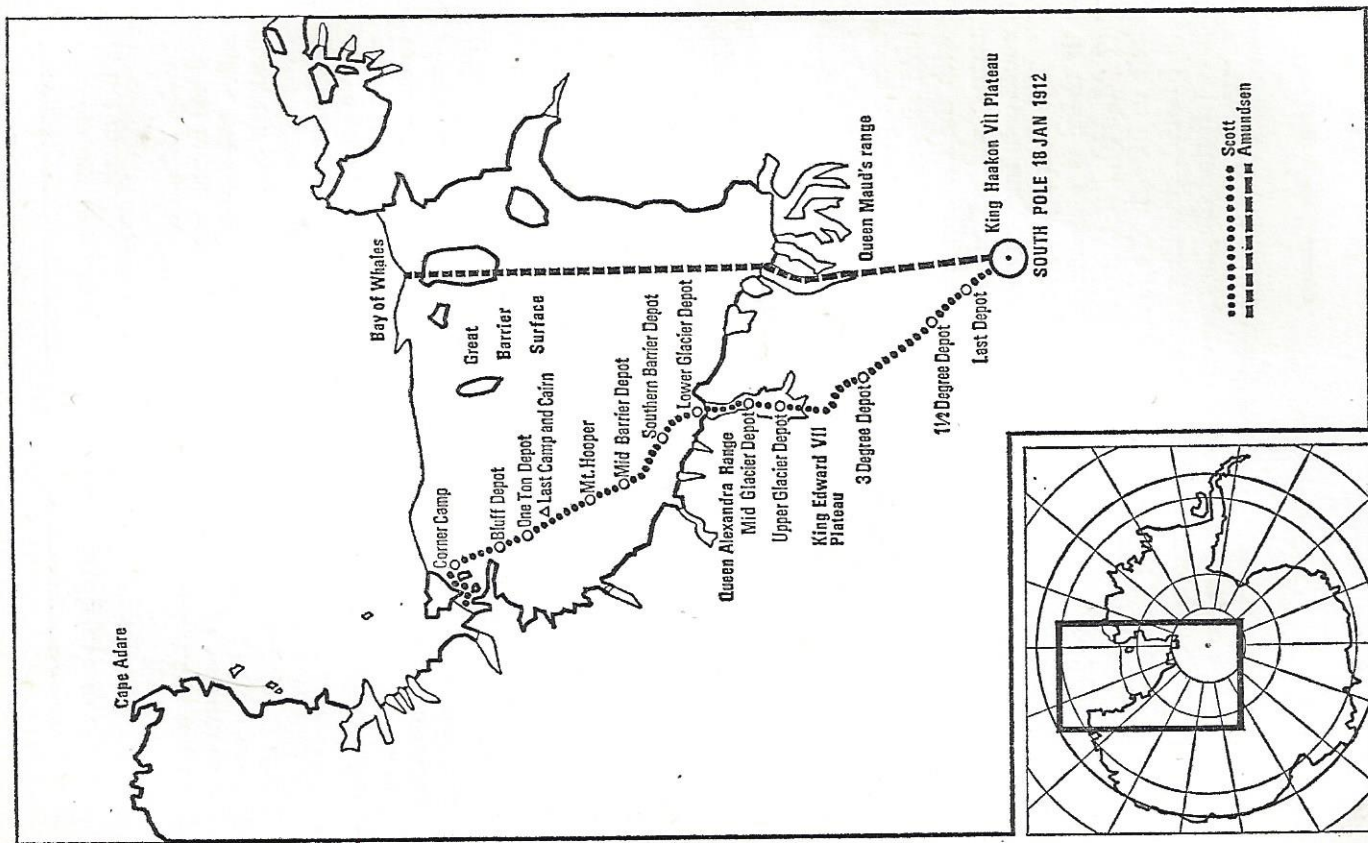
They prayed that March would come in like a lion. 'A blizzard, a succession of blizzards, would have been the salvation of them all,' was the verdict pronounced later by the Expedition's meteorologist, Dr. George Simpson. It would have meant a temperature rise. It would have provided the sledging surface of the Barrier. It would have provided an opportunity of hoisting a sledge sail, thus conserving energy. Yet on 2 March, 'in spite of a strong wind and a full sail', they covered only five and a half miles. Clearly, other factors were at work against them.

The oil shortage, which meant fewer hot meals, was one of them. There was less paraffin at the depots than they reckoned to find. The allowance per man per day on the return journey had been fixed at  $\frac{1}{4}$ st of a gallon. It was intended to ensure a margin against delays, but not against any considerable loss from evaporation or seepages. Both those causes operated in the case of the depot supplies. It is evident from Scott's journal that he did not accept them as solely accountable for the diminished quantities he found. Having recorded on 26 February, 'fuel woefully short', he confirmed it on arriving at the Middle Barrier Depot on 2 March. 'First we found a bare half gallon of oil,' a plain statement of fact that was rendered differently in the printed version of Scott's journal, 'arranged by Leonard Huxley',† where it reads: 'First we found a shortage of oil.'

Scott cited it as the first of 'three distinct blows which have placed us in a bad position'. The other two were the bad state of Oates's feet, and the 'dark overcast weather'. In the same entry he referred to their being 'in queer street', and to 'feeling

\* As confirmed by A. P. Thomson, M.D.: see *Antarctica* by J. Gordon Hayes (1927).

† Published by Smith, Elder & Co., 1913.



..... Scott  
and his team from their depot to the South Pole