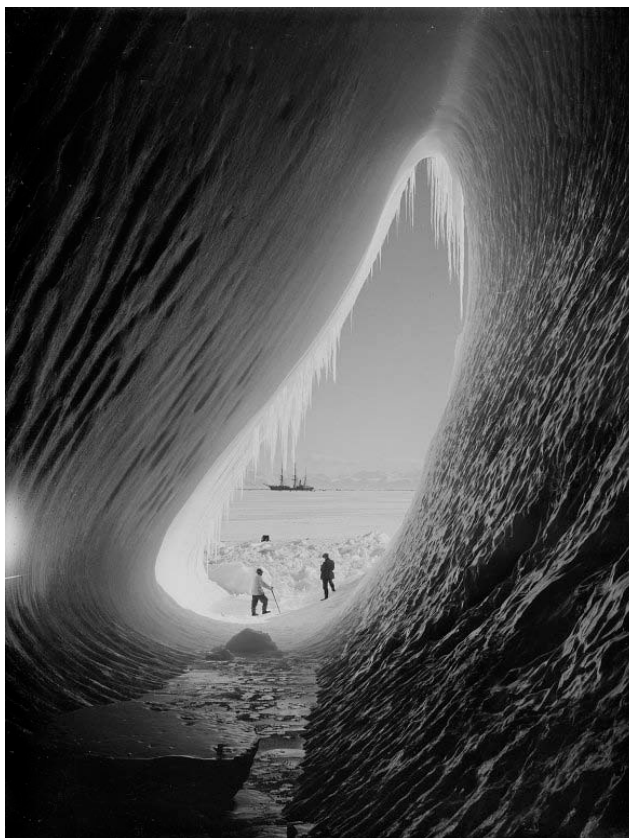


# Conquering the Antarctic



*Image: SPRI, University of Cambridge*

**Birmingham Symphony Hall**  
**Friday 3 February 2012, 7.30pm**

**Cambridge Corn Exchange**  
**Saturday 4 February, 2012, 7.30pm**

**Cardiff St David's Hall**  
**Tuesday 7 February, 7.30pm**

**Cheltenham Town Hall**  
**Wednesday 8 February, 7.30pm**

**Cadogan Hall, London**  
**Saturday 3 March, 7.30pm**

### **About the Expedition**

The **British Antarctic Expedition of 1910-13**, also known as the *Terra Nova* Expedition after the ship on which the explorers travelled, followed **Robert Falcon Scott's** *Discovery* Expedition of 1901-04. The earlier expedition had been a huge success, and hundreds of miles of the Antarctic coast had been discovered. Scott and his companions found many new species of animal as well as the first breeding emperor penguin colony. The trip was extremely important for later scientists in the understanding of global weather patterns.

Scott, who joined his first sea-going ship at 13, wanted to travel to the Antarctic once again, declaring that, "The main object of the expedition is to reach the South Pole and secure for the British Empire the honour of that achievement". This statement was made on the same day as the birth of Scott's only child, Peter, born to him and his wife Kathleen on 13 September 1909. Earlier in the year, rival explorer Ernest Shackleton (who had been part of Scott's *Discovery* team) had narrowly failed to reach the South Pole, and now it was Scott's turn to make the attempt. The project was planned as a privately funded expedition, with no significant institutional support from organisations such as the Royal Geographical Society, which had provided for similar journeys in previous years.

The *Terra Nova* was towed from the South-West India Docks on 1 June 1910 as cheering crowds watched, full of hope that the South Pole would finally be reached. The destination was reached on 17 January 1912, but it was the return journey that caused the tragic deaths of the five men left at this point in the expedition: Scott himself, Edgar Evans, Lawrence Oates, Henry Robertson Bowers, and scientist Edward Wilson, who had also been on the *Discovery* expedition.

A rival group of Norwegian explorers, led by **Roald Amundsen**, raced Scott's team to the South Pole. Amundsen had previously led the first successful expedition through the Northwest Passage, spending time amongst the Inuit, learning survival and sledging techniques from them. Amundsen wanted to be the first to reach the North Pole, but when the American explorers Frederick Cook and Robert Peary both independently claimed to have reached the North Pole in 1909, Amundsen turned his interests to the South Pole. Scott's team saw one of Amundsen's black marker flags in the distance as they approached their destination – the Norwegians had beaten them by 35 days.

The explorers suffered hugely from the harsh surroundings and freezing conditions during the expedition. Food consisted of pemmican (a concentrated mixture of dried meat and fat or lard), dried fruit, cocoa and biscuits. The explorers, held back by blizzards and difficult sledging conditions, suffered from malnutrition. Frostbite was another of the illnesses which plagued the men, with Scott stating that "amputation is the least I can hope for now, but will the trouble spread?" in his diary. The story of the Pole journey was told in Scott's journal, which were found by a search party eight months later, along with notebooks and letters which also described the brave events.

The search party found the bodies of Scott, Wilson and Bowers, who had died, trapped by a blizzard, from starvation and exposure, only 20 kilometres from a pre-arranged supply depot. Oates and Evans had died previously. Scott, aged 43, was the last to die, but declared in a letter to his wife that he had no

regrets about undertaking the challenge: “how much better it has been than lounging about in too great comfort at home”.

**Robert Falcon Scott** was born on 6 June 1868 at Outlands, Devonport, the third child of Hannah and John Scott, a brewer, and descendant of three generations of sailors. He was sent to Stubbington House, Fareham, Hampshire to be coached for a cadetship in the Royal Navy and joined the training ship HMS Britannia at the age of thirteen. Between 1883 and 1887, he served as midshipman on four vessels, HMS Boadicea, Liberty, HMS Monarch and HMS Rover, meeting Clements Markham, Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, for the first time in Rover.

Scott spent the winter of 1887 to 1888 at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich, passing his examination for the rank of lieutenant in 1888. He was commissioned as a sub-lieutenant and instructed to join the cruiser HMS Amphion, stationed in the Pacific. His service in the Pacific was followed by a brief spell in the Mediterranean in HMS Caroline and in September 1891, he reported on board the torpedo training ship, HMS Vernon, at Portsmouth for a two-year course. He emerged with first-class certificates in all subjects and was appointed to HMS Vulcan, an experimental torpedo depot-ship stationed in the Mediterranean. The next few years were clouded by family troubles. Scott's father had sold the brewery, living on the proceeds of the sale until the family was reduced to poverty. Scott applied for a transfer to HMS Defiance, a torpedo training ship stationed at Devonport, in order to help arrange the lease of the family home, Outlands. He was then appointed torpedo lieutenant in HMS Empress of India, meeting Clements Markham for a second time in 1897.

In the summer of 1897, Scott was appointed torpedo lieutenant to HMS Majestic and in the same year, his father died, leaving his mother, Hannah, almost penniless. Scott contributed to the support of his mother and his sisters, but after the death of his brother Archie in 1899, he became completely responsible for his family's welfare

In June 1899, while serving in Majestic, he met Clements Markham who told him of a proposed British Antarctic expedition and within two days, Scott had applied to command the expedition. In June 1900, Scott was appointed to lead the British National Antarctic Expedition, 1901-1904, and later in the same month was appointed to the rank of commander. Recruiting a company of Royal Navy and Merchant Navy seamen aboard the purpose-built expedition ship Discovery, and with a strong scientific team, the expedition sailed from Lyttleton on 21 December 1901, wintering at Hut Point, Ross Island.

Scott led the first major sledging expedition, accompanied by Edward Wilson and Ernest Shackleton, setting out in November 1902 to explore inland across the Ross Ice Shelf toward the South Pole. On 30 December 1902, they reached 82°17'S, their farthest south. In October 1903, Scott led a nine-man party westward to explore further the routes in the western mountains. Along with Edgar Evans and William Lashley, Scott climbed a staircase of glaciers to stand for the first time on the polar plateau. They then marched many miles across the bleak plain, turning back on 30 November, and returning to Discovery just in time to celebrate Christmas 1903. Having remained ice-bound in McMurdo Sound since 1902, Discovery was eventually freed from the ice in February 1904, after the arrival of the relief ships

Morning and Terra Nova. The expedition was highly successful, having made the first extensive exploration on land in Antarctica and producing many volumes of scientific results

On his return, Scott was promoted to captain, decorated and wrote a book on the expedition, *The Voyage of the Discovery*. This was followed by postings to HMS Victorious in 1906, HMS Albemarle in 1907 and HMS Essex in 1908. Later in 1908, he was appointed commander of HMS Bulwark and in September, he married Kathleen Bruce, a talented sculptress. Scott was appointed Naval Assistant to the Admiralty in 1909, but was motivated to plan an expedition to the South Pole by the success of the British Antarctic Expedition, 1907 - 1909 (leader Ernest Henry Shackleton). Shackleton had located the Pole on the featureless high ice plateau, and had come within 97 nautical miles of it.

Scott returned to the Antarctic with the British Antarctic Expedition, 1910 - 1913, wintering at Cape Evans on Ross Island. He led a strong scientific team, both naval and civilian, that included several companions from his previous expedition. Aware of the rival bid of Roald Amundsen, who was equipped with excellent dog teams, Scott started out for the Pole in late October 1911. With the aid of experimental tractors, dog teams and ponies, he followed his previous route across the Ross Ice Shelf before resorting to man-hauling up the Beardmore Glacier in Shackleton's footsteps.

The five-man polar party successfully traversed the plateau, reaching the Pole on 17 January 1912, to find that Amundsen had reached the South Pole on 14 December 1911. On the return journey, the weakened party faced exceptionally unfavourable weather and sledging conditions. Edgar Evans was the first to die, near the foot of the Beardmore. Lawrence Oates followed on 16 March, when he famously left the tent in a blizzard for the good of the party. Scott himself died with Henry Bowers and Edward Wilson in late March 1912, laid up by a blizzard 11 miles short of One Ton Depot.

## Trivia about Scott's expedition:

- Scott's team took a piano with them!
- More than 8,000 men volunteered to be part of the team.
- £40,000 had to be raised for the trip (over £3 million in today's money).
- 20 ponies and 34 sledge dogs were taken to the Antarctic with the explorers. The animals had to be inoculated 10 times before the journey.
- Temperatures reached below -40 degrees Celsius during Scott's trip.
- Scott took two experimental motor sledges, which had never been used for an expedition like this before. One was lost when it fell through ice during the unloading of the ship; the other broke down after 50 miles.
- The *Terra Nova* ship was the single most expensive item bought for the trip at £12,500.
- The Scott Polar Research Institute was founded using the residue of the money donated to the explorers' families following their deaths.
- Scott's hut was restored by the Antarctic Heritage Trust and is now open to visitors.

## Links with tour venue cities:

- Edward Wilson was born in Cheltenham; The Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum includes a gallery entirely devoted to him.
- Henry Bowers' mother came from Cheltenham.
- Edgar Evans was Welsh.
- The expedition loaded the ship with Welsh coal in Cardiff before they set off.
- The Scott Polar Research Institute was founded in Cambridge as the national memorial to the Polar Party.
- Edward Wilson attended Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.
- Some of the silverware taken on board Terra Nova was hallmarked in Birmingham.
- Cadbury's (Birmingham) were the official suppliers of chocolate for the trip!

## Fun facts about the Antarctic:

- It is the world's highest, driest, coldest and windiest continent (as well as the last to be discovered).
- Ancient Greek geographers were the first to guess there was a large landmass around the South Pole. They named it *Anti-Arkitkos* ('the opposite of the Arctic').
- Wind speeds of up to 351km per hour have been recorded.
- In 1983, the coldest temperature ever was recorded at a freezing -89.2 degrees Celsius.
- The distance between England and Antarctica is 11,000 miles.
- Ice in the middle of the continent can be up to 2500m (2 miles) thick.
- Antarctica is more than 58 times bigger than Great Britain.
- The pole moves with the ice at the rate of ten metres per year – each summer it has to be put back to its rightful geographical place.
- Antarctic ice sheets store 70% of the world's fresh water.
- The weight of the ice can push the land up to 500m below the water's surface.
- In Antarctica's Dry Valleys, less than 6cm of snow falls in a whole year.
- Although there are no trees, more than 100 million birds nest and breed on the Antarctic.
- Today, around 1,200 people spend the winter on Antarctica – about a third are scientists and the rest are support staff.
- On average, ice sheets are nearly 2.5km thick – that's the same as ten Canary Wharf towers on top of each other.
- Thanks to high levels of oxygen in the water, sea spiders grow up to 30cm across!

## Useful links for the project:

Scott Polar Research Institute [www.spri.ac.uk](http://www.spri.ac.uk)

Race for the Pole [www.raceforthepole.co.uk](http://www.raceforthepole.co.uk)

The Captain Scott Society [www.captainscottsociety.com](http://www.captainscottsociety.com)

Scott 100 Centenary [www.scott100.org](http://www.scott100.org)