

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton (1874-1922), a polar explorer notorious for his resilience and determination on the Endurance to Antarctica. Experiencing freezing temperatures and starvation, Shackleton should inspire us all to live life with no regrets.

Early Life

Born on 15th February 1874, Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton began his journey through life. From an early age, Shackleton was a voracious reader, a trait which sparked a passion for adventure. Up until the age of 11, Ernest Shackleton was educated by a governess, but after the family's move to south-east London at Sir Lodge Preparatory School, having his main education at Dulwich College. Age 16, Shackleton denied his father's wishes of becoming a doctor and joined the mercantile marine.

The Discovery

Shackleton's original expedition was aboard the Discovery ship. After being appointed as the third officer by Robert Falcon Scott, the crew set sail on 31st July. Arriving five months later (on 8th January 1902), they trekked to the South Pole, a significant experience for him: this expanded on his love for this continent. Unfortunately, they had to endure extremely difficult conditions and Ernest was victim to snow-blindness, frost bite and scurvy (a lack of vitamin C). He began his journey home when the illness got the better of him and never reached the South Pole, yet...

The Nimrod

After his courage and bravery during the Discovery Expedition, he became captain in order to lead his crew to the pole. He came close. Discovering the Beardmore Glacier and climbing Mount Erebus, he came closer to the summit than ever before. Only 180 kms away from the pole, the crew had to race to the hut point in time to catch the boat. As he came within such close proximity to the pole, he received a medal from King Edward VII and was made a knight. He was now Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton.

The Endurance Expedition

In 1911, Shackleton's dream was crushed when explorer Roald Amunson reached the earth's southern-most point. Although Shackleton's life goal was forgotten, he set his hope on a new mark: crossing the Antarctic via the South Pole.

Before the expedition, Ernest Shackleton placed a newspaper ad in The Times. It read, "Dangerous conditions, low wages and cold temperatures." Despite this rather unappealing ad, he interestingly received over 5,000 applicants, from which he only chose 26.

On 7th December 1914, Endurance entered Antarctica. Before the expedition could reach the coast the Endurance became frozen in an ice-float in the middle of the Weddell Sea in January 1915. Efforts by the crew to free the ship were unsuccessful, but Shackleton encouraged his men to keep their spirits high and try and follow everyday life. But the morale didn't last for long and on 27th October 1915 Shackleton gave the order to abandon ship. With several rations and five rowing boats, the crew set up camp on the ice: "When all hope is lost, get down on your knees and pray to Shackleton." He was all they had.

When the ice-float began to move they knew they had to too, so with five small rowing boats and only dogs to eat, they set off towards Elephant Island. Several weeks later they reached Elephant Island with no means of direction except for a subtle glimpse of the sun. Setting foot on land was a rare occurrence for the crew as they had by then been stranded on ice for a year. Still aiming for South Georgia Island, Shackleton and a few others made their way across one of the most treacherous seas in the world. Despite being thrown about by the water and surviving over 50ft waves, the adventure was not over yet. They reached the island but found themselves on the opposite side to the whaling station, so began a trek. From what seemed like a gift from God, they reached their destination. Miraculously they travelled back to Elephant Island and all 22 men were still alive and spirits high. Shackleton's aim hadn't been completed but his leadership skills would be admired forever.

Later Years and Death

Once recovered from the Endurance Expedition, Sir Ernest Shackleton enlisted in the army and served Britain in World War One. Shortly after, he attempted a fourth expedition aboard the Quest in 1921; he was aiming to circumnavigate the Antarctic continent. Unfortunately, on the outset of the journey he died at South Georgia from a heart attack. Many say it was caused by the strain of his many expeditions; these were thought to have worn out his

strength. Buried on South Georgia Island, thought to be a fitting final resting place as he had once famously trekked across this island. Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton had achieved the unachievable and shall never be forgotten.

"We had seen God in his splendours, heard the text that nature renders, we had reached the naked soul of man."

Legacy

Shackleton's triumphs were underestimated and did not catch the public eye straight away due to the World War. But over the last 50 years, Shackleton's many adventures have grabbed the limelight and we are now ensured that his legacy will live on. His courage and commitment will motivate us to rise to the challenges that face us in everyday life.

