



South: The Story of Shackleton's Last Expedition

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton (1874 – 1922)

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The race to reach the South Pole was won by Norwegian Roald Amundsen in 1911 after two British expeditions including Sir Ernest Shackleton set records but failed to reach the pole. Shackleton then resolved to cross the Antarctic continent from sea to sea and set off with a crew of 28 in 1914. *South: The Story of Shackleton's Last Expedition 1914-1917* is the first hand narrative chronicling the events of one of the most harrowing struggles for survival ever recorded. Disaster struck almost immediately upon entering the Wedell Sea when their ship, *Endurance*, was trapped in pack ice and slowly crushed. The group camped on the ice for over 16 months until the ship fell apart and the ice floe broke. They then set off in three lifeboats for a

346-mile journey to Elephant Island. Reaching land after five days but with discovery and rescue highly unlikely, Shackleton set off with five others for South Georgia Island, 720 nautical miles distant. After two weeks they battled hurricane winds to land on the unoccupied southern shore of the island, and then trekked 32 miles in 36 hours over dangerous mountain terrain to reach the whaling station. He commissioned a Chilean seagoing tug and a British whaler to return to Elephant Island to rescue the remaining 22 crew members. While the expedition failed its objective, it yielded an astonishing account of gigantic waves, roiling seas, mountainous glaciers, brutal cold and endless ice miraculously overcome by strength of will, immense courage and the amazing power of human endurance.

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton (February 15, 1874 – January 5, 1922) was a British explorer and a principal figure in the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration. He was born in County Kildare, Ireland to an Anglo-Irish family. A voracious reader but a bored student, he left school at 16 to go to sea as an apprentice on a sailing vessel. He traveled the world, learned the mariner's trade, and worked his way through the ranks of the merchant marine. In 1900 he landed an appointment as third officer of the National Antarctic Expedition. He accompanied Capt. Robert Falcon Scott and a small group on a southward march towards to pole, which set a record but subjected all to snow blindness, frostbite, and scurvy on the return journey, leaving Shackleton sufficiently debilitated to be sent home. As the first to return to Britain he was in demand and eventually became secretary of the Royal Scottish Geological Society. He married and dabbled in business and politics before garnering support for another expedition, the *Nimrod* expedition of 1907-1909 that came within 97 miles of the pole and made him a public hero. He maintained a strenuous schedule of lectures and public appearances and tried to capitalize on his celebrity without much luck. His expedition to make the transcontinental crossing followed in 1914-1917, after which he returned to the lecture circuit and published *South* in 1919. He set off on his last journey south in 1921 and died of a fatal heart on South Georgia Island in January 1922.