

Extracts from Scott's diary

These are extracts from the diary of Robert Falcon Scott, written on his expedition to the South Pole. Read the extracts and try to imagine what the experience must have been like for Scott and his men.

Saturday, January 28th 1911

We saw a dark object a quarter of a mile north as we reached the Barrier. I walked over and found it to be the tops of two tents more than half buried – Shackleton's tents we suppose. A moulting Emperor penguin was sleeping between them. The canvas on one tent seemed intact, but half stripped from the other.

The ponies pulled splendidly to-day, as also the dogs, but we have decided to load both lightly from now on, to march them easily, and to keep as much life as possible in them. There is much to be learnt as to their powers of performance. Keohane says 'Come on, lad, you'll be getting to the Pole' by way of cheering his animal – all the party is cheerful, there never were a better set of people.

Friday, March 31st, 1911

We are good for another week in pretty well every commodity and shall then have to reduce luxuries. But we have plenty of seal meat, blubber and biscuit, and can therefore remain for a much longer period if needs be. Meanwhile the days are growing shorter and the weather colder.

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Thursday, November 30th, 1911

A very pleasant day for marching, but a very tiring march for the poor animals, which, with the exception of Nobby, are showing signs of failure all round. We were slower by half an hour or more than yesterday. Except that the loads are light now and there are still eight animals left, things don't look too pleasant, but we should be less than 60 miles from our first point of aim. The surface was much worse to-day, the ponies sinking to their knees very often. There were a few harder patches towards the end of the march. In spite of the sun there was not much 'glide' on the snow. The dogs are reported as doing very well. They are going to be a great standby, no doubt. The land has been veiled in thin white mist; it appeared at intervals after we camped and I had taken a couple of photographs.

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Tuesday, January 16th, 1912

The worst has happened, or nearly the worst. We marched well in the morning and covered 7 ½ miles. Noon sight showed us in Lat. 89° 42' S., and we started off in high spirits in the afternoon, feeling that to-morrow would see us at our destination. About the second hour of the March Bowers' sharp eyes detected what he thought was a cairn; he was uneasy about it, but argued that it must be a sastrugus. Half an hour later he detected a black speck ahead. Soon we knew that this could not be a natural snow feature. We marched on, found that it was a black flag tied to a sledge bearer; near by the remains of a camp; sledge tracks and ski tracks going and coming and the clear trace of dogs' paws – many dogs. This told us the whole story. The Norwegians have forestalled us and are first at the Pole. It is a terrible disappointment, and I am very sorry for my loyal companions. Many thoughts come and much discussion have we had. To-morrow we must march on to the Pole and then hasten home with all the speed we can compass. All the day dreams must go; it will be a wearisome return. We are descending in altitude – certainly also the Norwegians found an easy way up.

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Sunday, March 17th, 1912

Lost track of dates, but think the last correct. Tragedy all along the line. At lunch, the day before yesterday, poor Titus Oates said he couldn't go on; he proposed we should leave him in his sleeping-bag. That we could not do, and induced him to come on, on the afternoon march. In spite of its awful nature for him he struggled on and we made a few miles. At night he was worse and we knew the end had come.

Should this be found I want these facts recorded. Oates' last thoughts were of his Mother, but immediately before he took pride in thinking that his regiment would be pleased with the bold way in which he met his death. We can testify to his bravery. He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint, and to the very last was able and willing to discuss outside subjects. He did not – would not – give up hope to the very end. He was a brave soul. This was the end. He slept through the night before last, hoping not to wake; but he woke in the morning – yesterday. It was blowing a blizzard. He said, 'I am just going outside and may be some time.' He went out into the blizzard and we have not seen him since.

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March 19th, 1912

Lunch. We camped with difficulty last night, and were dreadfully cold till after our supper of cold pemmican and biscuit and a half a pannikin of cocoa cooked over the spirit. Then, contrary to expectation, we got warm and all slept well. To-day we started in the usual dragging manner. Sledge dreadfully heavy. We are 15½ miles from the depot and ought to get there in three days. What progress! We have two days' food but barely a day's fuel. All our feet are getting bad – Wilson's best, my right foot worst, left all right. There is no chance to nurse one's feet till we can get hot food into us. Amputation is the least I can hope for now, but will the trouble spread? That is the serious question. The weather doesn't give us a chance – the wind from N. to N.W. and -40° temp, to-day.

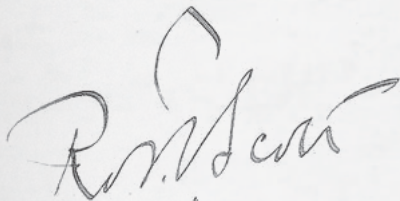
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Friday, March 29th, 1912

Since the 21st we have had a continuous gale from W.S.W. and S.W. We had fuel to make two cups of tea apiece and bare food for two days on the 20th. Every day we have been ready to start for our depot 11 miles away, but outside the door of the tent it remains a scene of whirling drift. I do not think we can hope for any better things now. We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker, of course, and the end cannot be far.

It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more.



R. SCOTT.

For God's sake look after our people.