



SPQ Module 2 – Amundsen & Scott

“Polar exploration is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has yet been devised.”

– Cherry-Garrard (member of the Scott expedition).

Throughout the South Pole Quest education program reference will be made to the expeditions of Roald Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott, and the remarkable efforts they made in 1910 - 1912 to be the first human beings to reach the South Pole. Since their expeditions 98 years ago many have followed in their footsteps, and in modern times, with the benefit of technology, the journey has become less daunting. The I2P South Pole Quest is another in a long lineage of such expeditions, and Ray, Richard and Kevin recognize the legacy of hard-won Antarctic knowledge and the gift of modern technology that will allow them to make this journey with greater safety.

In order to put the remaining modules in context, it is wise to first review the history of the original race for the South Pole. At I2P we believe that history is at heart about story telling. The stories of Amundsen and Scott are well worth listening to.

Roald Amundsen grew up dreaming of becoming an explorer. He was born to a family of ship-owners and captains in the Norwegian village of Borge. His parents hoped he would become a doctor but he quit university at the age of 21 for a life at sea. His first Antarctic experience came in 1897 - 99 when, as a crewmember on the Belgica Expedition they became trapped in the ice and were forced to overwinter in Antarctica. Although unprepared for such an eventuality remarkably only one expedition member died. Amundsen went on to lead his own expeditions and is credited with discovering the Northwest Passage in 1903 - 1905. During his time in Northern Canada he met and learned a great deal from the Inuit, traditional knowledge that he later put to use on his South Pole expedition. Amundsen is considered one of the greatest explorers of all time. He disappeared on June 18 1928 when a plane he was travelling in vanished in the Barents Sea north of Norway. He was never found.



Figure 1: Captain Roald Amundsen at the wheel leaving home for North Pole (source: United States [Library of Congress's](#) Prints and Photographs Division)

Robert Falcon Scott is better remembered for the tragic conclusion of his last polar expedition, which cost him his life. He was born in southern England to a family with a long Military tradition. He entered the navy at a young age and rose to the rank of captain. Scott led two expeditions to the Antarctic. The principle focus of his second voyage was attainment of the South Pole.

Both Amundsen and Scott arrived in Antarctica in 1910 and began preparing for their respective expeditions to the South Pole. Both set up home bases on the Ross Ice Shelf (about 700 kilometers apart) and built huts in which they and their men wintered over while preparing for their journeys the following year. Both made preparatory treks south laying down depots of supplies to be used during the final journey. Both pulled sledges laden with the supplies and equipment they would need for the return journey to the Pole. Both expeditions had routes that would require them to travel over 3000 miles to the Pole and back.

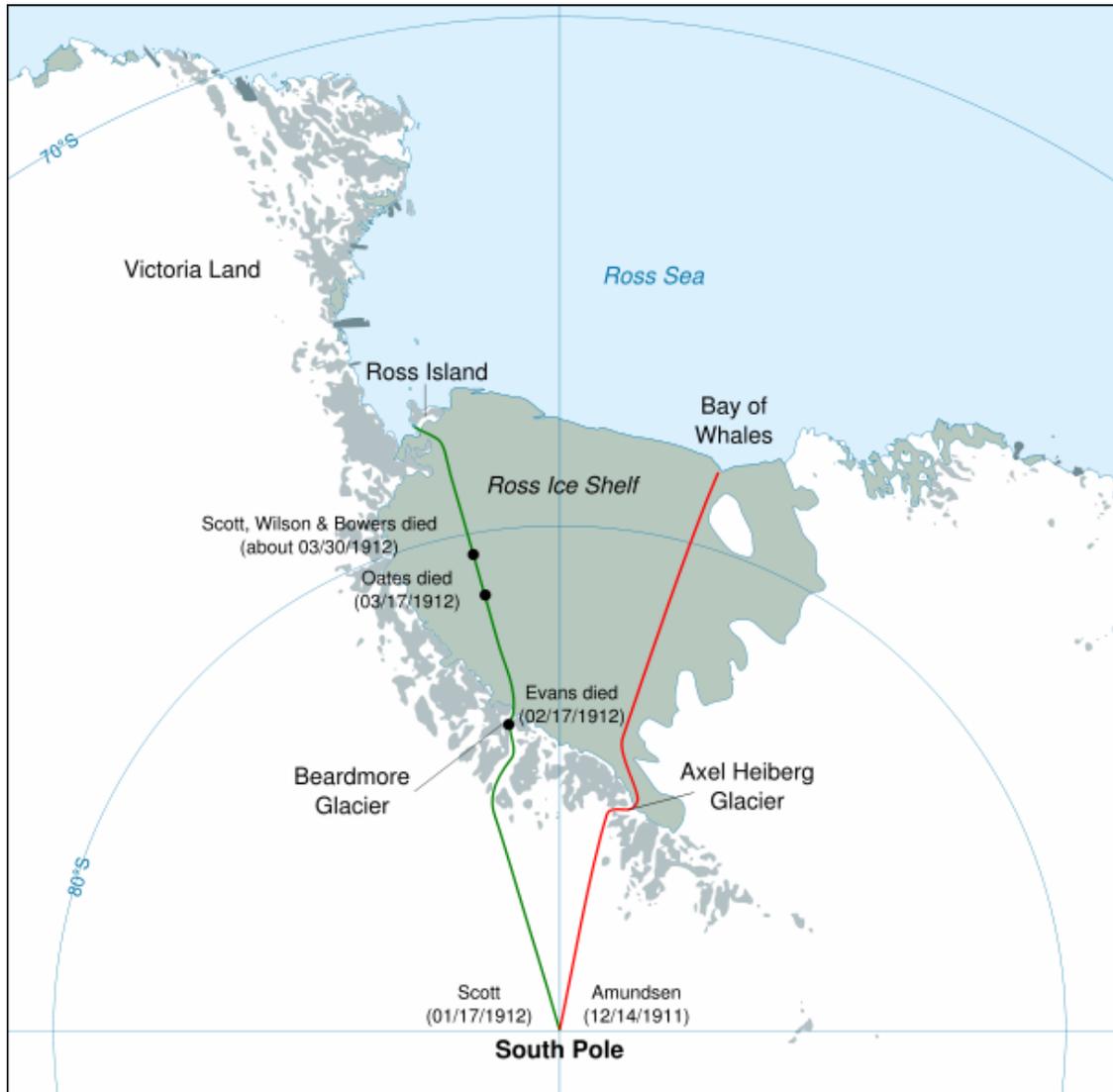


Figure 2: Amundsen and Scott's routes to the South Pole 1911 - 1912 (source: Landsat Image Mosaic of Antarctica - Shakki)

Despite these superficial similarities the two expeditions differed in many respects. Amundsen was a master planner and relied on traditional knowledge, using dog teams to travel and favored a diet rich in fresh meat. Scott used mostly man-hauling to drag his heavy sledges when the ponies and primitive motorized vehicles he brought failed. Amundsen arrived at the Pole in excellent health on December 14 1911. When Scott and his party arrived over a month later to find that the Norwegian team had forestalled them, they had lost a great deal of weight, were suffering from the effects of the cold and an inadequate diet. Finding themselves beaten to the Pole seemed to have a demoralizing effect on the British Polar team. Scott famously wrote upon reaching the South Pole,

“...Great God! This is an awful place...”



Figure 3: Scott and his men at the South Pole beside tent & flag the Norwegians had left to mark the spot (source: photo Lawrence Oates)

While Amundsen returned triumphantly to his base camp, pulled by his dog teams, Scott and his men turned around and trudged back, growing steadily weaker, their pace slowing. Suffering from severe frostbite and festering wounds the first of the five men, Evans succumbed, followed some weeks later by Oates. Lastly Scott and his two remaining companions Wilson and Bowers, trapped in a prolonged blizzard, ran out of food and fuel and froze to death in their tent. They were only eleven miles from the next supply depot.

TABLE 1: AMUNDSEN & SCOTT - SUPPLIES AT OUTSET OF RESPECTIVE EXPEDITIONS

EXPEDITION	MEN	TRANSPORTATION	SLEDGES
AMUNDSEN	5	52 dogs	4
SCOTT	16	23 dogs 10 ponies 2 motorized sleds	13



Figure 4: Motorized sled used on Scott's expedition. Three sleds were brought on the expedition. They all failed to operate after a short distance. (Source: Scanned from the book *Les Grands Explorateurs*. Herbert Ponting)

Modern South Polar expeditions are not as complex to stage as they were 100 years ago. As I write the South Pole Quest team is gathering equipment and making final preparations in Southern Chili, before being dropped by plane in Antarctica. After a few days' acclimatization and preparation in Antarctica Ray, Richard and Kevin will embark on their journey. Although unsupported - meaning they will be carrying all necessary supplies and equipment with them - they recognize that should the need arise they can call for emergency evacuation using a satellite phone (recognizing that depending on location and weather adventurers can be difficult to reach at times). Upon arriving at the South Pole the I2P team will be flown back to South America.

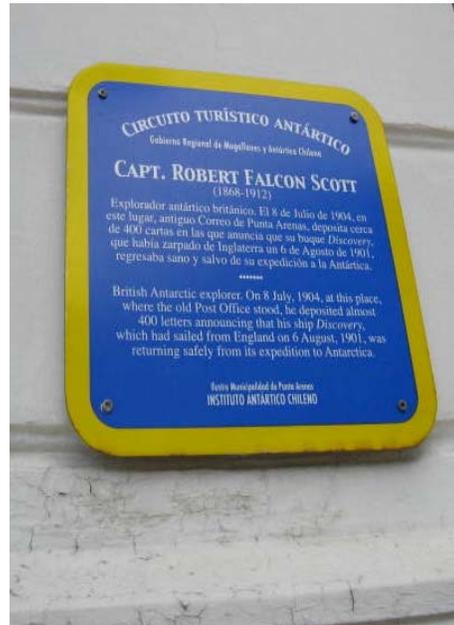


Figure 5: South Pole Quest team Members; Richard Weber, Ray Zahab and Kevin Vallely in Punta Arenas Chili on November 19 2008. They stand under a plaque marking the spot where Robert Falcon Scott posted letters to the world announcing the safe return of his ship Discovery from his first Antarctic voyage in 1904 (photo: Ewan Affleck)

In Amundsen and Scott's time going on a polar expedition meant being completely cut off from the outside world for the duration of the journey. The journey to Antarctic alone was very dangerous consisting of travel by wooden boat through high seas strewn with ice - boats that were sometimes lost to the crush of ice. Any significant injury or illness in the course of an expedition meant almost certain death.

The words of Apsley Cherry-Garrard, a member of the Scott party support team in his famous account of the journey 'The Worst Journey in the World', summarize the difference between the two expeditions:

"On the one hand, Amundsen going straight there, getting there first, and returning without the loss of a single man, and without having put any greater strain on himself and his men than was all in a day's work of polar exploration. Nothing more business-like could be imagined. On the other hand, our expedition, running appalling risks, performing prodigies of superhuman endurance... yet reaching the Pole only to find our terrible journey superfluous, and leaving our best men dead on the ice."



Ponies used on the Scott Expedition. They did not tolerate the climate well. (Source: Scanned from the book Les Grands Explorateurs.)