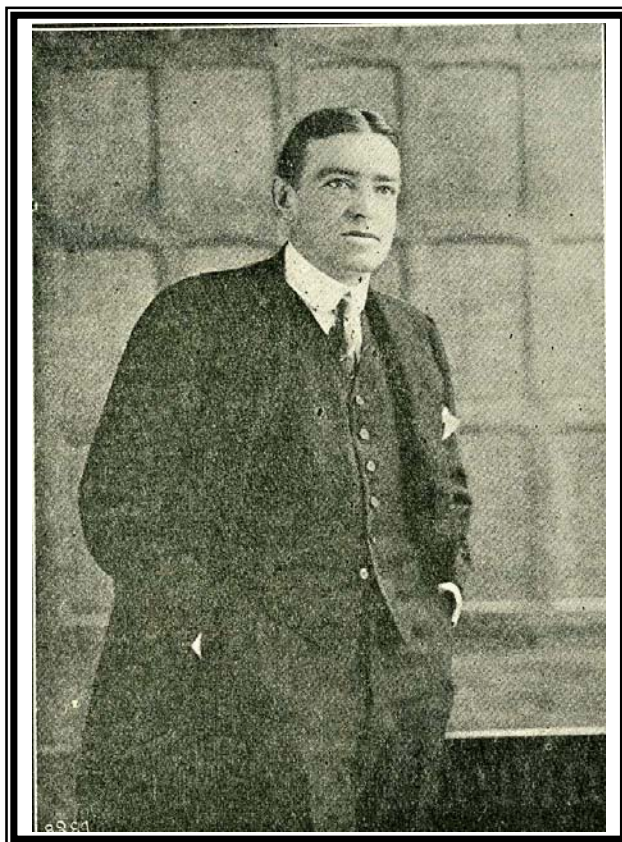


ACROSS THE ANTARCTIC.
SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON'S EXPEDITION.



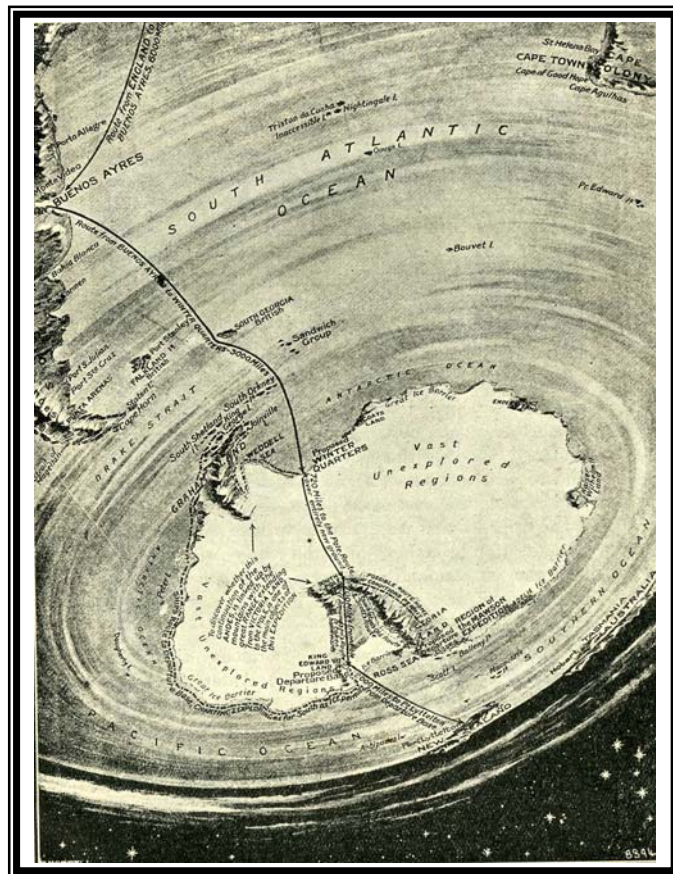
Down in the South, by the waste without sail on it –
Far from the zone of the blossom and tree –
Lieth, with winter and whirlwind and wail on it,
Ghost of a land by the ghost of a sea.
-
Kendall.

Almost unnoticed in the excitement of war, two vessels slipped away recently for the Antarctic, bearing a party of British explorers who have set themselves a task greater than any task previously attempted by polar explorers. This is the crossing of the great Antarctic continent, a journey of 1,700 miles or more across the most inhospitable part of the world. The party is led by Sir Ernest Shackleton, who is already world-famous as an explorer.

Sir Ernest Shackleton, then a lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve, was a member of Captain Scott's first expedition of 1902, which had its base in the Ross Sea, and pushed much further south than man had previously been. In 1907-09 he himself led an expedition to the same part of the Antarctic, and was the first to reach the great plateau, some 10,000 feet high, in which the South Pole is known to be situated. With fine determination and pluck he and his comrades climbed the huge Beardmore Glacier, and advanced across the plateau until they reached a spot 113 miles from the Pole. There they were obliged to turn back owing to shortage of supplies. They suffered dreadful hardships in the long march back to their ship, and their story will always be one of the most inspiring and thrilling in the annals of exploration.

In 1910 Captain Scott led another expedition to the Ross Sea, and on the 18th January, 1912, reached the South Pole, to find that he had been forestalled by Captain Amundsen, the Norwegian explorer, who had reached the Pole a month previously. Captain Amundsen had started from a base some distance to the east, and nearer to the Pole, and had been lucky enough to find an easier route over the mountains guarding the interior, and to experience better weather than his rival. All of Captain Scott's party died the death of heroes on the return journey. Every boy and girl should be familiar with that story of splendid courage and self-sacrifice.

The South Pole had been reached, and as far as the eye could see, there was no break in the flatness of the tableland. But only a very small portion of the interior of the vast Antarctic continent had been explored. If you look at the routes of the explores on the map you will realize how small was the area explored by them, compared with the great expanse round the Pole. The geography of the Antarctic would not be complete until it was known what lay between the Pole and the atlantic Ocean. Sir Ernest Shackleton determined to find out by crossing the continent from the Weddell Sea (which lies south of South America) to the Ross Sea, by way of the Pole.



The "Graphic."]

SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON'S PROPOSED ROUTE ACROSS ANTARCTICA

For the undertaking Sir Ernest Shackleton is using two ships. One has already gone to the Weddell Sea, carrying the main party, including the leader. Some of this party will explore the coastline to the east and west of the Weddell Sea, while the leader and the rest push into the interior. The other ship, leaving Australia, is to land a party

at a base in the Ross Sea, and the party will advance into the interior and lay stores of supplies for the use of Sir Ernest Shackleton's men as they advance from the Pole.

You must understand the enormous difficulties connected with journeying in the Antarctic. The region is the most inhospitable on earth. The cold is so intense that every part of the body has to be protected, and even short exposure renders one liable to frost-bite. Terrific blizzards – gales accompanied by snow – sweep over the barren wastes, so that a man may be hopelessly lost ten yards from his tent. Every ounce of food and fuel has to be carried, for in the interior there is no life of any kind, vegetable or animal, of use to man.

Before Scott and Shackleton set out for the Pole, they made expeditions to lay depots or stores of food in advance of the main party, and this party also dropped stores for use on the return journey.



The "Graphic."]

SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON IN THE ANTARCTIC.

In spite of the greatest care and foresight in laying these depots, Scott's party perished for want of food and fuel. The furnishing of expeditions with equipment and food is therefore a matter of the very highest importance. Everything must be foreseen, and everything must be of the very best quality. An omission or a mistake may cost the lives of all the party.

Shackleton, Scott, and Amundsen, in their return from the interior, came back along their outward routes. What makes Sir Ernest Shackleton's present expedition unique is that he will march right across the Antarctic land-mass, and will have little if any help – at least so far as the first half of the journey is concerned – from stores laid in the snow and ice. He proposes to set out immediately he reaches the Weddell

Sea, carrying with him food enough for the whole journey, the distance being 1,700 miles by the shortest route and 2,600 miles by the longest.

It is the intention of the party at the Ross Sea to lay depots for Shackleton far into the interior, and if it is successful he will be able to lengthen his route on this side of the continent, and do more exploring work. But quite a number of things may happen to prevent this party doing what it wishes to do, and the leader must be prepared for the worst that may happen.

Bear in mind, too, that from the Weddell Sea to the Pole, a distance of 800 miles, Sir Ernest Shackleton will be marching over unknown country. The difficulties of the route from the Ross Sea to the polar plateau, through the mighty chain of mountains, are enormous, but those surrounding the advance from the other side may be greater. Sir Ernest Shackleton and his men are therefore undertaking a perilous task, which will demand the most skilful preparation, the highest courage, and the greatest determination and endurance.

What do these explorers expect to gain by this adventure? First of all they want to add to our knowledge of the great Antarctic continent. It has not been proved conclusively that it is a continent – that land stretches the whole way from the Ross Sea to the Weddell Sea. We want to know whether the great mountain system that has been traced to the Pole (the plateau being part of it) extends across the continent, and was originally part of the chain that runs along the western coast of America. Scientists with the various parties will take observations of the weather in the Antarctic, examine fish and other sea-life along the coast, and study the formation of the land. They will thus add to our knowledge of meteorology, the study of the weather; biology, the study of plant and animal life; and geology, the study of the earth's crust.

The study of the weather in the Antarctic is of special importance, because the conditions there affect the weather in South America, Australia, and our own country. An equally important matter is the magnetism of the earth, which is always investigated by Antarctic explorers. This is a subject that cannot be explained here; we can only say that it is connected with the navigation of ships across the ocean by means of the compass. The more it is studied in the Antarctic and elsewhere, the more accurately, and therefore the more safely, are captains able to navigate their ships from point to point.