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The Race to the Pole III

Lead: By October 1911, early spring in Antarctica, two expeditions, separated by 400 miles of ice, were ready to begin their assault on the South Pole. One would make it. One would not.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: On October 20th, the four-man party led by Norwegian Roald Amundsen, an experienced arctic explorer, with four sledges pulled by 52 dogs, began its journey. Twelve days later the team led by Robert Falcon Scott, Amundsen's

rival, began its trek borne by dogs, Siberian ponies, and motorized sledges. Scott knew of his competitor but he was confident that he would bring home the honor to England of being the first to reach the South Pole. Having led a prior scientific expedition to Antarctica and coming within 400 miles of the pole Scott had a reputation as a careful and meticulous naval officer. He was a popular figure at home and most anticipated that he would be the victor.

Amundsen had arrived in Antarctica early in 1911 and set up a base camp on the Ross Ice Shelf. Over the next several months before the onset of the bitter Antarctic winter,

he established a series of base camps to within 500 miles of the pole. His choice of sled dogs proved to be a fortuitous one, because they could be killed along the way and eaten as food by the other dogs and humans in case of an emergency. Amundsen had encountered good weather for most of the way and only a few natural obstacles. He and his team arrived at the South Pole on December 14, 1911. After three days of exploration in the general vicinity of the pole, they returned to their base camp reaching it at the end of January.

Scott encountered trouble from the beginning. His motor sledges broke down almost immediately. The ponies died or had to be shot before they

conveyed the party to the pole. An absence of food required that the dog teams be sent back. That left the remaining members of the party having to carry or drag all of their supplies to the pole and back. After all that, in what must have been the expedition's most bitter moment of disappointment, Scott and his companions arrived at the South Pole on January 17, 1912 only to discover that Amundsen had come and gone. They found a Norwegian flag planted in the ice and a letter from Amundsen to Scott. The Brit wrote in his journal, "Great God! This is an awful place and terrible enough for us to have laboured to it without the reward of priority."

During the 800 mile return trip, all members of Scott's party perished either from exhaustion, starvation, hypothermia or scurvy. They died in the midst of a blizzard within 11 miles of the closest cache of supplies. The tent with their frozen bodies was found later in the year with his records and diaries intact which gave a complete description of the expedition.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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The Antarctic Connection

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