

FOREWORD

It is just over 50 years since man first reached the geographical South Pole; Roald Amundsen on 14 December 1911, followed by Robert Falcon Scott on 18 January 1912. As a tribute to these men and their companions, a plaque has been presented to the United States "Amundsen-Scott" station at the South Pole by representatives of Great Britain and Norway.

The plaque is of Black Fossil, an Irish limestone which is light grey in the rough and acquires an almost black surface when polished. It was engraved by Reynolds Stone, RDI, and is illustrated in the frontispiece.

The presentation ceremony took place at the South Pole on 30 October 1961. Dr T. Gjelsvik, Director of Norsk Polarinstitut; Dr G. de Q. Robin, Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute; P. M. Smith, Senior United States Research Program representative; and A. Roberts, leader of the New Zealand wintering party at "Scott base" were flown by United States aircraft from "NAF McMurdo" to the South Pole, where they were met by Rear-Admiral D. M. Tyree, USN, Commander Naval Support Force, Antarctica. Dr P. A. Siple was also present.

The ceremony began in the dining-hall of the "Amundsen-Scott" station. Rear-Admiral Tyree welcomed the guests and paid tribute to the courage and achievements of the two explorers... "Scott and Amundsen added to the sum of man's knowledge, more important, they added immensely to the sum of man's inspiration". Dr Gjelsvik, Dr Robin, Mr Smith and Mr Roberts also spoke and the company then moved out to the flag-post marking the exact position of the South Pole. Here the plaque was presented to Lieut. P. K. Swartz, USN, Officer-in-Charge of the station, with the following words:

"Fifty years ago, on 18 January 1912, Robert Falcon Scott found the tent left by Amundsen on this site. Inside the tent was a note listing the names of Amundsen's party, which are shown on this plaque. To these names we have added those of Scott's heroic party.

"We present this plaque to your station as a tribute from the people of the United Kingdom and Norway, particularly from the Scott Polar Research Institute and Norsk Polarinstitut, in recognition of the way in which the men of the United States are carrying on the traditions of Amundsen and Scott at your South Pole station. We hope it will form a suitable reminder of the example and deeds of these men to all who visit and work at this station."

The fate of Scott's Pole Party is too well known to repeat here, but less, perhaps, is known about the later history of Amundsen and his men.

Amundsen's returning South Pole Party reached their base, "Framheim", on 25 January 1912. The ninety-five days of their 1,860 mile journey had passed with few untoward incidents, and the successful expedition was ready to leave Antarctica five days later. Amundsen, Hanssen and Wisting were to continue their interest in polar affairs, while Bjåland and Hassel returned to their civilian occupations.

Roald Amundsen (1872–1928) almost immediately began to equip *Fram* for his long deferred Arctic drift expedition, and had bought a Farman biplane for reconnaissance work when the First World War broke out and his plans were halted. Characteristically, he set himself to make a large sum of money out of shipping with which he built and equipped *Maud* and sailed her on a new expedition in July 1918. The plan was to reach the Chukchi Sea by way of the North East Passage and enter the pack ice in that area. The expedition was dogged by misfortune, and, after it had finally reached Alaska, Amundsen handed over the command to O. Wisting and H. U. Sverdrup and turned his attention to air transport. In 1922 he embarked on a catastrophic venture to raise aircraft and funds which, by 1924, had brought him financial disaster. Then his luck changed as he began his successful association with Lincoln Ellsworth. Together, in 1925, they made a notable Arctic flight northwards from Spitsbergen, which, though it cost them one of their aircraft and very nearly the lives of the whole party, was a major pioneering venture. In 1926 they crossed the Arctic Basin in the dirigible *Norge*, and Amundsen retired with his reputation at its zenith. In 1928 he disappeared without trace when his aircraft was lost during the search for the survivors of the dirigible *Italia*.

Helmer Julius Hanssen (1870–1956) was a fisherman and sealer. He had been captain of the sealer *Elida* in 1898 and Second Mate on *Gjøa* during Amundsen's traverse of the North West Passage in 1903–06. He was ice pilot on *Fram*, 1910–12. He joined Amundsen again in 1918–20 as captain of *Maud* during the voyage through the North East Passage, leaving her in Alaska. In 1924 he was sledging expert and dog driver with the Oxford University Spitsbergen Expedition, leading the party which crossed Nordaustlandet from east to west. Two years later he visited Greenland and Spitsbergen as polar adviser to a film company. He was also employed for some years in the Norwegian Customs Department and, in 1928, was appointed government Ship Inspector at Tromsø. He published *Voyages of a Modern Viking* (London, 1930), *Gjennem isbaksen atten år med Roald Amundsen* (Oslo, 1941), and *Der harte Weg: mit Amundsen im Kampf um die Pole* (Wiesbaden, 1955).

Oscar Wisting (1871–1936) was a petty officer in the Royal Norwegian Navy and remained closely associated with Amundsen until the latter's death. He was a member of the *Maud* expedition from 1918 to 1925, becoming captain and joint-leader of the expedition in 1922. He accompanied Amundsen during the *Norge* crossing of the Arctic Basin, and in 1928 was captain of the *Veslekari* during the search for his old leader. He became a captain in the Royal Norwegian Navy, and published *16 år med Roald Amundsen* (Oslo, 1930).

Olav Bjåland¹ (1872–1961) had been a carpenter and noted ski-er, he returned to these occupations after the expedition.

Helge Sverre Hassel (1876–1928) was a shipmaster and had served with Otto Sverdrup in *Fram*, taking part in sledge journeys in northern Greenland. He later joined the Norwegian Customs and, at the time of his death was in charge of the Customs House at Grimstad.

¹ *Polar Record*, Vol. 11, No. 70, 1962, p. 112.

The ships of the two expeditions also came to very different ends.

Fram was built for Nansen's Arctic drifting voyage, and all the polar experience of Nansen himself, Otto Sverdrup and the builder, Colin Archer, was combined to produce a perfect instrument for withstanding immense ice pressure. She was a wooden schooner, 39 m. (128 ft.) in length, 11 m. (36 ft.) in breadth and equipped with a 220 hp auxiliary engine. After Nansen's polar drift of 1893–96, *Fram* was used by Otto Sverdrup in 1898–1902 in the Sverdrup Islands area before being lent to Amundsen in 1910. On his return from the Antarctic in 1912, Amundsen hoped to use *Fram* for an Arctic voyage, but it was found that she was no longer fit for hard service. After lying up for some years, she has now been preserved in a specially built museum at Bygdø near Oslo.

The *Terra Nova* had been built in Dundee in 1884 for the Arctic whaling industry, and was specially strengthened for this purpose. She was a wooden three-masted barque, 187 ft. (57 m.) in length, 31 ft. (9.4 m.) in breadth, and was equipped with a 140 hp auxiliary engine. Besides her whaling activities, she had been to the Arctic with the Jackson–Harmsworth expedition, 1894–97, and to the Antarctic as a supply ship during Scott's *Discovery* expedition, 1901–04.

After the return of the British Antarctic Expedition, 1910–13, she was bought back by her former owners, Bowring Bros. Ltd., and sailed back to St John's, Newfoundland, in August 1913. She was then square rigged, but the yards were later removed and the boiler and funnel replaced by those from the naval vessel *Lobelia*. Between 1914 and 1942 she was engaged in the Newfoundland seal fisheries for the months of March and April, and laid up for the remainder of each year. During the First World War she was also used for coastal trading, and made at least one voyage to Wales.

In 1942 she was chartered to Newfoundland Base Contractors (US) to carry supplies to United States stations in Greenland. While on this service she received ice damage and was repaired in a Greenland port. During the homeward voyage, however, she sprang leaks and sank near the south-western tip of Greenland, on 13 September 1943. The crew was rescued by a United States Coastguard cutter.