

EDITOR'S NOTE

In April of this year the Canadian government gave permission to Dome Petroleum Ltd to proceed with its plans for drilling during the open water season of 1976 at two sites in the Beaufort Sea. In June six ships left Victoria, BC, on one of the most controversial expeditions ever made to the Arctic Ocean. The fleet consisted of two drill-ships, three supply and icebreaking vessels and a bulk carrier. Its task was to begin drilling the first of 15 offshore wells in Dome Petroleum's planned five-year search for oil and natural gas. The idea of drilling in the Beaufort Sea from an offshore platform or drill-ship, as opposed to an artificial island, was first mooted in 1972. In mid-1973 the government granted approval in principle subject to the completion of a comprehensive series of environmental studies, collectively known as the Beaufort Sea Project. Peter Wadhams discusses the aims and achievements of the project and, in particular, the consequences of a major oil spill, in his article on oil and ice in the Beaufort Sea. He believes that damage to the environment could be extensive and irreversible, should a blowout occur. It is possible that, in an area of extremely hazardous ice conditions, a dangerous precedent has been set.

The use of the air cushion vehicle (ACV) in the Arctic would seem to be increasing. Despite their high operational cost, these vehicles can perform tasks of which no other ground transport is capable. Their speed is impressive, and drilling operations from the artificial islands in the Beaufort Sea, where time is of the utmost importance, are supported by this method of transport. Howard Fowler discusses the various Arctic roles that the ACV is already performing satisfactorily, and suggests future uses for its capabilities. The vehicle's icebreaking potential is a recent and particularly exciting discovery. Transport of a rather more primitive kind is described by Stephen Dibbern. He follows the fortunes of both Shackleton and Scott in their attempts to make use of motor transport to help them reach the elusive South Pole. It is a frustrating, and yet amusing tale, which serves to confirm the great vision of these two explorers.

The annual hunt for the Harp Seal takes place off the east Canadian coast every March. The resulting controversy over the fate of the seal, also an annual affair, can only be solved by the accumulation of a large amount of biological data in order to improve management practices and maintain the population at some optimum and stable size. David Lavigne explains how the use of ultra-violet photography has enabled much more accurate estimates of Harp Seal population size to be made and, incidentally, how Arctic camouflage is not perhaps as effective as it was. More seal data can be found in *SCAR Bulletin*, which contains an analysis of the numbers of seals killed or captured in the Antarctic Treaty Area from 1970-73.