

= Ross Sea party 1914 ? 16 =

The Ross Sea party was a component of Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans @-@ Antarctic Expedition 1914 ? 17 . Its task was to lay a series of supply depots across the Great Ice Barrier from the Ross Sea to the Beardmore Glacier , along the polar route established by earlier Antarctic expeditions . The expedition's main party , under Shackleton , was to land on the opposite , Weddell Sea coast of Antarctica , and to march across the continent via the South Pole to the Ross Sea . As the main party would be unable to carry sufficient fuel and supplies for the whole distance , their survival depended on the Ross Sea party's depots , which would cover the final quarter of their journey .

Shackleton set sail from London on his ship Endurance , bound for the Weddell Sea in August 1914 . Meanwhile , the Ross Sea party personnel gathered in Australia , prior to departure for the Ross Sea in the second expedition ship , SY Aurora . Organisational and financial problems delayed their start until December 1914 , which shortened their first depot @-@ laying season . After their arrival the inexperienced party struggled to master the art of Antarctic travel , in the process losing most of their sledge dogs . A greater misfortune occurred when , at the onset of the southern winter , Aurora was torn from its moorings during a severe storm and was unable to return , leaving the shore party stranded .

Despite these setbacks , the Ross Sea party survived inter @-@ personnel disputes , extreme weather , illness , and the deaths of three of its members to carry out its mission in full during its second Antarctic season . This success proved ultimately without purpose , because Shackleton's main expedition was unable to land after Endurance was crushed in the Weddell Sea ice . Shackleton eventually led his men to safety , but the transcontinental march did not take place and the Ross Sea party's depots were not required . The Ross Sea party remained stranded until January 1917 , when Aurora , which had been repaired and refitted in New Zealand , arrived to rescue them . Public recognition of their efforts was slow in coming , but in due course four Albert Medals were awarded to members of the party , two posthumously . Shackleton later wrote that those who died " gave their lives for their country as surely as those who gave up their lives in France or Flanders . "

= = Background = =

After the conquest of the South Pole by Roald Amundsen in December 1911 Shackleton , who had sought this achievement himself , was forced to rethink his polar ambitions . He believed that there remained " one great main objective of Antarctic journeyings ? the crossing of the South Polar continent from sea to sea . " Basing his strategy on plans developed earlier by the Scottish explorer William Spiers Bruce , Shackleton planned to land with his main party as far south as possible , on the Weddell Sea coast . His transcontinental team would then march southward to the Pole , before continuing across the polar plateau and descending via the Beardmore Glacier ( which Shackleton had discovered in 1909 ) to the Great Ice Barrier . The final stretch would take them across the Barrier to McMurdo Sound on the Ross Sea coast .

Shackleton estimated that the crossing would cover approximately 1 @, @ 800 miles ( 2 @, @ 900 km ) , a distance too great for his party to carry all its supplies . In support of the main journey , therefore , a separate Ross Sea party would land in McMurdo Sound and would lay a series of supply depots across the 400 miles ( 640 km ) width of the Barrier , to assist the crossing group home . It would also carry out scientific investigations . Shackleton described the depot @-@ laying as vital to the success of the whole undertaking , but believed it would not present any great difficulties in execution . The Ross Sea party's vessel would be SY Aurora , a ship recently used by Douglas Mawson and the Australasian Antarctic Expedition .

= = Personnel = =

To lead the Ross Sea party Shackleton chose Aeneas Mackintosh , having first attempted to

persuade the Admiralty to provide him with a naval crew . Mackintosh , like Shackleton , was a former Merchant Navy officer , who had been on the Nimrod expedition until his participation was cut short by an accident that resulted in the loss of his right eye . Another Nimrod veteran , Ernest Joyce , whose Antarctic experiences had begun with Captain Scott 's Discovery Expedition , was appointed to take charge of sledging and dogs . Joyce was described by Shackleton 's biographer , Roland Huntford , as " a strange mixture of fraud , flamboyance and ability " , but his depot @-@ laying work during the Nimrod expedition had impressed Shackleton . Ernest Wild , a Royal Naval petty officer , was added to the party possibly through the persuasion of his brother , Frank Wild , who was travelling as Shackleton 's second @-@ in @-@ command on Endurance .

Some of the appointments to the party were made rather hurriedly , reflecting the limited time frame that Shackleton had allowed for preliminary organisation . Joseph Stenhouse , a young officer from the British India Steam Navigation Company , was appointed as the Aurora 's First Officer after travelling from Australia to London to seek an interview with Shackleton . The Reverend Arnold Spencer @-@ Smith , a Scottish Episcopal Church priest and former schoolmaster , joined as a replacement for one of the original members of the expedition who had left for active service in the First World War . Victor Hayward , a London finance clerk with a taste for adventure was recruited on the basis of his having worked on a ranch in Canada .

Although the Ross Sea party 's main role was to lay supply depots , Shackleton added a small scientific team to carry out biological , meteorological and magnetic research in the region . The chief scientist in this group was Alexander Stevens , a Scots geologist and former theology student . John Cope , a 21 @-@ year @-@ old Cambridge graduate , was the team 's biologist ; a would @-@ be medical student , he later became ship 's surgeon . Two other scientists were appointed in Australia , the physicist Dick Richards ( who signed up for a nominal wage of £ 1 per week ) and industrial chemist Keith Jack . An Australian cousin of Spencer @-@ Smith 's , Irvine Gaze , was taken on as a general assistant .

= = Problems in Australia = =

Mackintosh and the nucleus of the party arrived in Sydney , Australia , late in October 1914 . They found that Aurora was in no condition for an Antarctic voyage , and required an extensive overhaul . The registration of the ship in Shackleton 's name had not been properly completed , and Shackleton had evidently misunderstood the terms under which he had acquired the vessel from Mawson . Mawson had reclaimed much of the equipment and stores that had been aboard , all of which needed replacing . To compound the problem , Shackleton had reduced the funds available to Mackintosh from £ 2 @,@ 000 to £ 1 @,@ 000 , expecting him to bridge the difference by soliciting for supplies as free gifts and by mortgaging the ship . There was no cash available to cover the wages and living expenses for the party .

Shackleton was now beyond reach , aboard Endurance en route for Antarctica . Supporters of the expedition in Australia , notably Edgeworth David who had served as chief scientist on the Nimrod expedition , were concerned at the plight in which Mackintosh 's party had been placed . They helped to raise sufficient funds to keep the expedition alive , but several members of the party resigned or abandoned the venture . Some of the last @-@ minute replacements were raw recruits ; Adrian Donnelly , a locomotive engineer with no sea experience , signed as second engineer , while wireless operator Lionel Hooke was an 18 @-@ year @-@ old electrical apprentice .

Despite all these difficulties , Aurora set out from Sydney on 15 December 1914 , bound for Hobart , where she arrived on 20 December to take on final stores and fuel . On 24 December , three weeks later than the original target sailing date , the Aurora finally sailed for the Antarctic , arriving off Ross Island on 16 January 1915 . Mackintosh decided to establish a shore base at Cape Evans , Captain Scott 's headquarters during the 1910 ? 13 Terra Nova Expedition , and to find a safe winter mooring nearby for Aurora .

= = First season , 1914 ? 15 = =

= = = Depot @-@ laying , January ? March 1915 = = =

Believing that Shackleton might attempt a crossing during the first season , Mackintosh decided that the first two depots had to be laid without delay , one at 79 ° S near Minna Bluff , a prominent Barrier landmark , and another further south at the 80 ° mark . These were , in his view , the minimum that would enable Shackleton 's party to survive a crossing of the Barrier . The delayed arrival of Aurora in the Antarctic had given little time for acclimatisation for the dogs and for the untrained men , and this led to differences of view about how to proceed . Ernest Joyce , by far the most experienced Antarctic traveller in the party , favoured a cautious approach and wanted to delay the start by at least a week . Joyce claimed that Shackleton had given him independent control over sledging activities , a view rejected by Mackintosh and later demonstrated as without foundation .

Mackintosh 's view having prevailed , on 24 January 1915 the first of three parties set out for the Barrier journey , the others following on the next day . Further dissension soon arose between Joyce and Mackintosh about how far south the dogs should be taken . Joyce wanted them to go no further than the Bluff , but Mackintosh 's sense of urgency meant that they were taken on to 80 ° S. A further setback was the failure of the attempts to move stores by motor tractor . Although , ultimately , the depots were laid at Minna Bluff and at 80 ° S , the overall operation was beset by problems . Not all the stores had reached the depots , and , as well as the motor tractor failure , all ten dogs taken on the journey perished during the return . By the time that all parties were reunited at Hut Point ( Scott 's old Discovery base at the edge of the Barrier ) on 25 March , the men themselves were exhausted and frostbitten , and there was a significant loss of confidence in Mackintosh . The condition of the sea ice in McMurdo Sound made the journey back to Cape Evans impossible , so the party was stranded until 1 June , in spartan conditions and relying on seals for fresh meat and blubber fuel .

It was later revealed that this first depot @-@ laying season , and its attendant hardships , had been unnecessary . Shackleton had stated , in a letter sent from South Georgia on 5 December 1914 ( the date that Endurance left South Georgia for the Weddell Sea ) to Ernest Perris of the Daily Chronicle , that he had " no chance of crossing that season " . Mackintosh was to have been informed of this , but " the cable was never sent " .

= = = Loss of the Aurora = = =

When Mackintosh departed on 25 January 1915 to lead the depot @-@ laying parties he left the Aurora under the command of First Officer Joseph Stenhouse . The priority task for Stenhouse was to find a winter anchorage in accordance with Shackleton 's instructions not to attempt to anchor south of the Glacier Tongue , an icy protrusion midway between Cape Evans and Hut Point . This search proved a long and hazardous process . Stenhouse manoeuvred in the Sound for several weeks before eventually deciding to winter close to the Cape Evans shore headquarters . After a final visit to Hut Point on 11 March to pick up four early returners from the depot @-@ laying parties , he brought the ship to Cape Evans and made it fast with anchors and hawsers , thereafter allowing it to become frozen into the shore ice .

On the night of 7 May a severe gale erupted , tearing the Aurora from its moorings and carrying it out to sea attached to a large ice floe . Attempts to contact the shore party by wireless failed . Held fast , and with its engines out of commission , the Aurora began a long drift northward away from Cape Evans , out of McMurdo Sound , into the Ross Sea and eventually into the Southern Ocean . Ten men were left stranded ashore at Cape Evans . Aurora finally broke free from the ice on 12 February 1916 and managed to reach New Zealand on 2 April .

= = = Improvisation = = =

Because Mackintosh had intended to use Aurora as the party 's main living quarters , most of the shore party 's personal gear , food , equipment and fuel was still aboard when the ship departed .

Although the sledging rations intended for Shackleton 's depots had been landed , the ten stranded men were left with " only the clothes on their backs " . Mackintosh summarised their situation : " We have to face the possibility that we may have to stay here , unsupported , for two years . We cannot expect rescue before then , and so we must conserve and economize on what we have , and we must seek and apply what substitutes we can gather " . Their first recourse was to the food and materials from supplies left behind by Scott 's and Shackleton 's earlier expeditions . These supplies provided a harvest of material , which enabled clothing , footwear and equipment to be improvised , while the party used seal meat and blubber as extra sources of food and fuel . " Joyce 's Famous Tailoring Shop " fashioned clothes from a large canvas tent abandoned by Scott 's expedition . Even a brand of tobacco ? " Hut Point Mixture " ? was concocted by Ernest Wild from sawdust , tea , coffee and a few dried herbs . By these means the party equipped itself for the sledging journeys that lay ahead in the second season . On the last day of August Mackintosh recorded in his diary the work that had been completed during the winter , and ended : " Tomorrow we start for Hut Point " .

= = Second depot @-@ laying season 1915 ? 16 = =

= = = Journey to Mount Hope = = =

The second season 's work was planned in three stages . First , all depot stores ? 3 @, @ 800 pounds ( 1 @, @ 700 kg ) in total ? were to be transferred from Cape Evans to Hut Point . These stores would then be transported from Hut Point to a base depot at Minna Bluff . Finally , a journey south would be made , to reinforce the 80 ° depot and lay new ones at 81 ° , 82 ° , 83 ° , and lastly at Mount Hope , near the foot of the Beardmore Glacier , at 83 ° 30 ' .

Nine men in teams of three would undertake the sledging work . The first stage , hauling over the sea ice to Hut Point , started on 1 September 1915 , and was completed without mishap by the end of the month . The second stage , hauling back and forth between Hut Point and the Bluff , proved more problematic , with unfavourable weather , a difficult Barrier surface , and more dissension between Mackintosh and Joyce over methods . This time , Mackintosh favoured man @-@ hauling while Joyce wanted to use the four fit dogs ? of the six dogs that had survived the winter , two were pregnant and could not work . Mackintosh allowed Joyce to proceed in his own way , leading a party of six with the dogs , while Mackintosh continued to man @-@ haul with Wild and Spencer @-@ Smith . Joyce 's methods proved the more effective in terms of loads carried and the fitness of the men . The base depot at Minna Bluff was completed by 28 December .

Shortly after the main march to Mount Hope began , on 1 January 1916 , the failure of a Primus stove led to three men ( Cope , Jack and Gaze ) returning to Cape Evans , where they joined Stevens . The scientist had remained at the base to take weather measurements and watch for the ship . The remaining six sledged south , with Spencer @-@ Smith failing rapidly and Mackintosh complaining of a painful knee . They battled on , laying the depots , using only minimum provisions themselves although , at Joyce 's insistence , keeping the dogs well @-@ fed : " The dogs are our only hope ; our lives depend on them . " As they neared Mount Hope , Spencer @-@ Smith collapsed , unable to proceed . The others left him alone in a small tent and travelled the remaining few miles to lay the final depot at Mount Hope on 26 January 1916 . Ernest Wild left a letter for his brother Frank who he assumed was by then travelling across from the Weddell Sea with Shackleton .

= = = Return = = =

The party turned for home on 27 January , picking up Spencer @-@ Smith on 29th . He was by now physically helpless and had to be loaded on to the sledge . Mackintosh was soon unable to pull , and could only stagger along beside the sledge ; by this time the de facto leadership of the group had passed to Joyce and Richards . Joyce described the group 's plight : " I have never known such shocking conditions . This is one of the hardest pulls since we have trekked ... all we can do is to

slog on with the greatest possible speed . "

In spite of their difficulties the party made good progress until , on 17 February about 10 miles ( 16 km ) short of the Bluff depot , they were halted by a blizzard . They remained tent @-@ bound for five days , by which time their supplies had run out . In desperation the party left the tent the next day , but it soon proved impossible for Mackintosh and Spencer @-@ Smith to travel further . Joyce , Richards and Hayward then sledged through the blizzard to the Bluff , leaving the invalids in a tent under the care of Wild . This round trip of about 20 miles ( 32 km ) took them a week to complete . They returned with food and fuel to sustain their comrades , and the march resumed . Within a short time Mackintosh joined Spencer @-@ Smith on the sledge , and before long , Hayward too collapsed . The three men still on their feet were by now too weak to haul three invalids , so on 8 March Mackintosh volunteered to stay in the tent while the others attempted to take Spencer @-@ Smith and Hayward to Hut Point . A day later Spencer @-@ Smith died , utterly worn out by exhaustion and scurvy , and was buried in the ice . Joyce and Wild reached Hut Point with Hayward on 11 March and went back for Mackintosh . By 16 March the whole surviving party had reached the hut .

From the start of the hauling of loads from Cape Evans on 1 September 1915 to the arrival of the survivors back at Hut Point , a total of 198 days had passed , the longest sledging journey in terms of elapsed time undertaken on any expedition up to that time .

= = = Deaths of Mackintosh and Hayward = = =

The five survivors slowly recovered their strength with a diet of seal meat . The ice was too thin for them to risk the final trip to Cape Evans , and the monotony of their diet and surroundings became wearisome . On 8 May Mackintosh announced that he and Hayward intended to risk the ice and walk to Cape Evans . Against the strenuous objections of their companions they departed , and within the hour disappeared into a blizzard . The others went to look for them after the storm and found only tracks leading to the edge of the broken ice . Mackintosh and Hayward were never seen again . They had either fallen through the thin ice or had been carried out to sea on an ice floe . Richards , Joyce and Wild waited until 15 July to make the trip to Cape Evans , where they were at last reunited with Stevens , Cope , Jack and Gaze .

= = Rescue = =

After Aurora 's arrival in New Zealand in April 1916 , Stenhouse began the task of raising funds for the ship 's repair and refit , prior to its return to Antarctica to rescue the marooned men . This proved difficult : nothing had been heard from Shackleton since Endurance had left South Georgia in December 1914 , and it seemed likely that relief expeditions were necessary for both strands of the expedition . However , the Imperial Trans @-@ Antarctic Expedition was completely out of funds , and there was no obvious alternative source of finance . Given the chaotic financial circumstances in which Aurora had departed from Australia , private subscribers were hard to find . Finally , the governments of Australia , New Zealand and Great Britain agreed jointly to fund the refit of Aurora , but insisted on their joint committee having full control of the relief expedition .

On 31 May , Shackleton arrived in the Falkland Islands with the story of his escape after the loss of Endurance in the Weddell Sea . His first priority was to effect the rescue of the rest of the Weddell Sea party , stranded on Elephant Island , and it was early December before he arrived in New Zealand . He was too late to influence the organisation of the Ross Sea party 's relief ; the joint committee had appointed John King Davis to lead the expedition and had dismissed Stenhouse and Aurora 's other officers . Davis was a veteran of Mawson 's recent Australasian expedition , and had turned down Shackleton 's offers in 1914 of the command of either Endurance or Aurora . As a gesture , Shackleton was permitted to sail as a supernumerary officer when the ship left on 20 December . On 10 January 1917 , when Aurora reached Cape Evans , the survivors were astonished to see Shackleton approaching them ; they then learned for the first time the futility of their labours . After a further week spent in a vain search for the bodies of Mackintosh and Hayward

, Aurora headed north for New Zealand , carrying the seven survivors of the original shore party .

= = Aftermath = =

The Hut Point and Cape Evans huts remain , protected by the Antarctic Heritage Trust and the New Zealand government . Within the Cape Evans hut an inscription by Richards on the wall near his bunk , listing the names of those lost , can still be read , but the generally deteriorating condition of the huts has caused concern .

The Aurora survived for less than a year after her final return from the Ross Sea . Shackleton had sold her for £ 10 @, @ 000 , and her new role was as a coal @-@ carrier between Australia and South America . She disappeared in the Pacific Ocean , on or about 2 January 1918 , having either foundered in a storm or been sunk by an enemy raider . Aboard her was James Paton of the Ross Sea ship 's party , who was still serving as her boatswain . Ernest Wild was also a victim of the First World War . He died of typhoid in Malta , on 10 March 1918 , while serving with the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean .

On 4 July 1923 , Joyce and Richards were awarded Albert Medals by George V for their bravery and life @-@ saving efforts during the second depot @-@ laying journey . Wild and Victor Hayward received the same award , posthumously . Many of the survivors enjoyed long and successful careers . The young wireless operator , Lionel Hooke , joined Amalgamated Wireless Australasia Ltd and was responsible for many technological innovations . He became the company 's managing director in 1945 and its chairman in 1962 , having been knighted for services to industry in 1957 . Of the four dogs who survived the trek , Con was killed by the other dogs in a fight before the rescue . The others , Oscar , Gunner and Towser , returned in the ship to New Zealand and were placed in Wellington Zoo , where Oscar lived , allegedly , to the age of 25 . Near the end of his life Dick Richards , the last survivor of the party , was without regrets and did not regard the struggle as futile . Rather , he believed , it was something that the human spirit had accomplished , and that no undertaking carried through to conclusion was for nothing .