

“The First Account”

Roald Amundsen

1912

ON FEBRUARY 10, 1912, we started for the South to establish depots, and continued our journey until April 11. We formed three depots and stored in them 3 tons of provisions, including 22 hundredweight of seal meat. As there were no landmarks, we had to indicate the position of our depots by flags, which were posted at a distance of about four miles to the east and west. The first barrier afforded the best going, and was specially adapted for dog-sledging. Thus, on February 15 we did sixty-two miles with sledges. Each sledge weighed 660 pounds, and we had six dogs for each. The upper barrier (“barrier surface”) was smooth and even. There were a few crevasses here and there, but we only found them dangerous at one or two points. The barrier went in long, regular undulations. The weather was very favourable, with calms or light winds. The lowest temperature at this station was -49° F., which was taken on March 4.

When we returned to winter quarters on February 5 from a first trip, we found that the *Fram* had already left us. With joy and pride we heard from those who had stayed behind that our gallant captain had succeeded in sailing her farther south than any former ship. So the good old *Fram* has shown the flag of Norway both farthest north and farthest south. The most southerly latitude reached by the *Fram* was 78° 41’.

Before the winter set in we had 60 tons of seal meat in our winter quarters; this was enough for ourselves and our 110 dogs.

We had built eight kennels and a number of connecting tents and snow huts. When we had provided for the dogs, we thought of ourselves. Our little hut was almost entirely covered with snow. Not till the middle of April did we decide to adopt artificial light in the hut. This we did with the help of a Lux lamp of 200 candle-power, which gave an excellent light and kept the indoor temperature at about 68° F. throughout the winter. The ventilation was very satisfactory, and we got sufficient fresh air. The hut was directly connected with the house in which we had our workshop, larder, storeroom, and cellar, besides a single bathroom and observatory. Thus we had everything within doors and easily got at, in case the weather should be so cold and stormy that we could not venture out.

The sun left us on April 22, and we did not see it again for four months. We spent the winter in altering our whole equipment, which our depot journeys had shown to be too heavy and clumsy for the smooth barrier surface. At the same time we carried out all the scientific work for which there was opportunity. We made a number of surprising meteorological observations. There was very little snow, in spite of there being open water in the neighbourhood. We had expected to observe higher temperatures in the course of the winter, but the thermometer remained very low. During five months temperatures were observed varying between -58° and -74° F. We had the lowest (-74° F.) on August 13; the weather was calm. On August 1 we had -72° F. with a wind of thirteen miles an hour. The mean temperature for the year was -15° F. We expected blizzard after blizzard, but had only two moderate storms. We made many excellent observations of

the aurora australis in all parts of the heavens. Our bill of health was the best possible throughout the whole winter. When the sun returned on August 24 it shone upon men who were healthy in mind and body, and ready to begin the task that lay before them.

We had brought the sledges the day before to the starting-point of the southern journey. At the beginning of September the temperature rose, and it was decided to commence the journey. On September 8 a party of eight men set out, with seven sledges and ninety dogs, provisioned for ninety days. The surface was excellent, and the temperature not so bad as it might have been. But on the following day we saw that we had started too early. The temperature then fell, and remained for some days between -58° and -75° F. Personally we did not suffer at all, as we had good fur clothing, but with the dogs it was another matter. They grew lanker and lanker every day, and we soon saw that they would not be able to stand it in the long run. At our depot in lat. 80° we agreed to turn back and await the arrival of spring. After having stored our provisions, we returned to the hut. Excepting the loss of a few dogs and one or two frostbitten heels, all was well. It was not till the middle of October that the spring began in earnest. Seals and birds were sighted. The temperature remained steady, between -5° and -22° F.

Meanwhile we had abandoned the original plan, by which all were to go to the south. Five men were to do this, while three others made a trip to the east, to visit King Edward VII. Land. This trip did not form part of our programme, but as the English did not reach this land last summer, as had been their intention, we

agreed that it would be best to undertake this journey in addition.

On October 20 the southern party left. It consisted of five men with four sledges and fifty-two dogs, and had provisions for four months. Everything was in excellent order, and we had made up our minds to take it easy during the first part of the journey, so that we and the dogs might not be too fatigued, and we therefore decided to make a little halt on the 22nd at the depot that lay in lat. 80°. However, we missed the mark owing to thick fog, but after two or three miles' march we found the place again.

When we had rested here and given the dogs as much seal meat as they were able to eat, we started again on the 26th. The temperature remained steady, between -5° and -22° F.

At first we had made up our minds not to drive more than twelve to eighteen miles a day; but this proved to be too little, thanks to our strong and willing animals. At lat. 80° we began to erect snow beacons, about the height of a man, to show us the way home.

On the 31st we reached the depot in lat. 81°. We halted for a day and fed the dogs on pemmican. On November 5 we reached the depot in 82°, where for the last time the dogs got as much to eat as they could manage.

On the 8th we started southward again, and now made a daily march of about thirty miles. In order to relieve the heavily laden sledges, we formed a depot at every parallel we reached. The journey from lat. 82° to 83° was a pure pleasure trip, on account of the surface and the temperature, which were as favourable as one could wish. Everything went swimmingly until the 9th, when we

sighted South Victoria Land and the continuation of the mountain chain, which Shackleton gives on his map, running south-east from Beardmore Glacier. On the same day we reached lat. 83°, and established here Depot No. 4.

On the 11th we made the interesting discovery that the Ross Barrier ended in an elevation on the south-east, formed between a chain of mountains running south-eastward from South Victoria Land and another chain on the opposite side, which runs south-westward in continuation of King Edward VII. Land.

On the 13th we reached lat. 84°, where we established a depot. On the 16th we got to 85°, where again we formed a depot. From our winter quarters at Framheim we had marched due south the whole time.

On November 17, in lat. 85°, we came to a spot where the land barrier intersected our route, though for the time being this did not cause us any difficulty. The barrier here rises in the form of a wave to a height of about 300 feet, and its limit is shown by a few large fissures. Here we established our main depot. We took supplies for sixty days on the sledges and left behind enough provisions for thirty days.

The land under which we now lay, and which we were to attack, looked perfectly impossible, with peaks along the barrier which rose to heights of from 2,000 to 10,000 feet. Farther south we saw more peaks, of 15,000 feet or higher.

Next day we began to climb. The first part of the work was easy, as the ground rose gradually with smooth snow-slopes below the mountain-side. Our dogs working well, it did not take us long to get over these slopes.

At the next point we met with some small, very steep glaciers, and here we had to harness twenty dogs to each sledge and take the four sledges in two journeys. Some places were so steep that it was difficult to use our ski. Several times we were compelled by deep crevasses to turn back.

On the first day we climbed 2,000 feet. The next day we crossed small glaciers, and camped at a height of 4,635 feet. On the third day we were obliged to descend the great Axel Heiberg Glacier, which separates the mountains of the coast from those farther south.

On the following day the longest part of our climbing began. Many detours had to be made to avoid broad fissures and open crevasses. Most of them were filled up, as in all probability the glacier had long ago ceased to move; but we had to be very careful, nevertheless, as we could never know the depth of snow that covered them. Our camp that night was in very picturesque surroundings, at a height of about 5,000 feet.

The glacier was here imprisoned between two mountains of 15,000 feet, which we named after Fridtjof Nansen and Don Pedro Christophersen.

At the bottom of the glacier we saw Ole Engelstad's great snow-cone rising in the air to 19,000 feet. The glacier was much broken up in this narrow defile; enormous crevasses seemed as if they would stop our going farther, but fortunately it was not so bad as it looked.

Our dogs, which during the last few days had covered a distance of nearly 440 miles, put in a very good piece of work that day, as they did twenty-two miles on ground rising to 5,770 feet.

It was an almost incredible record. It only took us four days from the barrier to reach the immense inland plateau. We camped at a height of 7,600 feet. Here we had to kill twenty-four of our brave dogs, keeping eighteen -- six for each of our three sledges. We halted here for four days on account of bad weather. On November 25 we were tired of waiting, and started again. On the 26th we were overtaken by a raging blizzard. In the thick, driving snow we could see absolutely nothing; but we felt that, contrary to what we had expected -- namely, a further ascent -- we were going rapidly downhill. The hypsometer that day showed a descent of 600 feet. We continued our march next day in a strong wind and thick, driving snow. Our faces were badly frozen. There was no danger, but we simply could see nothing. Next day, according to our reckoning, we reached lat. 86° . The hypsometer showed a fall of 800 feet. The following day passed in the same way. The weather cleared up about noon, and there appeared to our astonished eyes a mighty mountain range to the east of us, and not far away. But the vision only lasted a moment, and then disappeared again in the driving snow. On the 29th the weather became calmer and the sun shone -- a pleasant surprise. Our course lay over a great glacier, which ran in a southerly direction. On its eastern side was a chain of mountains running to the south-east. We had no view of its western part, as this was lost in a thick fog. At the foot of the Devil's Glacier we established a depot in lat. $86^{\circ} 21'$, calculated for six days. The hypsometer showed 8,000 feet above sea level. On November 30 we began to ascend the glacier. The lower part was much broken up and dangerous, and the thin bridges of snow over the crevasses often broke un-

der us. From our camp that evening we had a splendid view of the mountains to the east. Mount Helmer Hansen was the most remarkable of them all; it was 12,000 feet high, and covered by a glacier so rugged that in all probability it would have been impossible to find foothold on it. Here were also Mounts Oskar Wisting, Sverre Hassel, and Olav Bjaaland, grandly lighted up by the rays of the sun. In the distance, and only visible from time to time through the driving mists, we saw Mount Thorvald Nilsen, with peaks rising to 15,000 feet. We could only see those parts of them that lay nearest to us. It took us three days to get over the Devil's Glacier, as the weather was unusually misty.

On December 1 we left the glacier in high spirits. It was cut up by innumerable crevasses and holes. We were now at a height of 9,370 feet. In the mist and driving snow it looked as if we had a frozen lake before us; but it proved to be a sloping plateau of ice, full of small blocks of ice. Our walk across this frozen lake was not pleasant. The ground under our feet was evidently hollow, and it sounded as if we were walking on empty barrels. First a man fell through, then a couple of dogs; but they got up again all right. We could not, of course, use our ski on this smooth-polished ice, but we got on fairly well with the sledges. We called this place the Devil's Ballroom. This part of our march was the most unpleasant of the whole trip. On December 2 we reached our greatest elevation. According to the hypsometer and our aneroid barometer we were at a height of 11,075 feet -- this was in lat. 87° 51'. On December 8 the bad weather came to an end, the sun shone on us once more, and we were able to take our observations again. It proved that the observations and our reckoning

of the distance covered gave exactly the same result -- namely, $88^{\circ} 16'$ S. lat. Before us lay an absolutely flat plateau, only broken by small crevices. In the afternoon we passed $88^{\circ} 23'$, Shackleton's farthest south. We pitched our camp in $88^{\circ} 25'$, and established our last depot -- No. 10. From $88^{\circ} 25'$ the plateau began to descend evenly and very slowly. We reached $88^{\circ} 29'$ on December 9. On December 10, $88^{\circ} 56'$; December 11, $89^{\circ} 15'$; December 12, $89^{\circ} 30'$; December 13, $89^{\circ} 45'$.

Up to this moment the observations and our reckoning had shown a surprising agreement. We reckoned that we should be at the Pole on December 14. On the afternoon of that day we had brilliant weather -- a light wind from the south-east with a temperature of -10° F. The sledges were going very well. The day passed without any occurrence worth mentioning, and at three o'clock in the afternoon we halted, as according to our reckoning we had reached our goal.

We all assembled about the Norwegian flag -- a handsome silken flag -- which we took and planted all together, and gave the immense plateau on which the Pole is situated the name of "King Haakon VII.'s Plateau."

It was a vast plain of the same character in every direction, mile after mile. During the afternoon we traversed the neighbourhood of the camp, and on the following day, as the weather was fine, we were occupied from six in the morning till seven in the evening in taking observations, which gave us $89^{\circ} 55'$ as the result. In order to take observations as near the Pole as possible, we went on, as near true south as we could, for the remaining 9 kilometres. On December 16 we pitched our camp in brilliant

sunshine, with the best conditions for taking observations. Four of us took observations every hour of the day -- twenty-four in all. The results of these will be submitted to the examination of experts.

We have thus taken observations as near to the Pole as was humanly possible with the instruments at our disposal. We had a sextant and artificial horizon calculated for a radius of 8 kilometres.

On December 17 we were ready to go. We raised on the spot a little circular tent, and planted above it the Norwegian flag and the Fram's pennant. The Norwegian camp at the South Pole was given the name of "Polheim." The distance from our winter quarters to the Pole was about 870 English miles, so that we had covered on an average 15 1/2 miles a day.

We began the return journey on December 17. The weather was unusually favourable, and this made our return considerably easier than the march to the Pole. We arrived at "Framheim," our winter quarters, in January, 1912, with two sledges and eleven dogs, all well. On the homeward journey we covered an average of 22 1/2 miles a day. The lowest temperature we observed on this trip was -24° F., and the highest +23° F.

The principal result -- besides the attainment of the Pole -- is the determination of the extent and character of the Ross Barrier. Next to this, the discovery of a connection between South Victoria Land and, probably, King Edward VII. Land through their continuation in huge mountain-ranges, which run to the south-east and were seen as far south as lat. 88° 8', but which in all probability are continued right across the Antarctic Continent.

We gave the name of “Queen Maud’s Mountains” to the whole range of these newly discovered mountains, about 530 miles in length.

The expedition to King Edward VII. Land, under Lieutenant Prestrud, has achieved excellent results. Scott’s discovery was confirmed, and the examination of the Bay of Whales and the Ice Barrier, which the party carried out, is of great interest. Good geological collections have been obtained from King Edward VII. Land and South Victoria Land.

The Fram arrived at the Bay of Whales on January 9, having been delayed in the “Roaring Forties” by easterly winds.

On January 16 the Japanese expedition arrived at the Bay of Whales, and landed on the Barrier near our winter quarters.

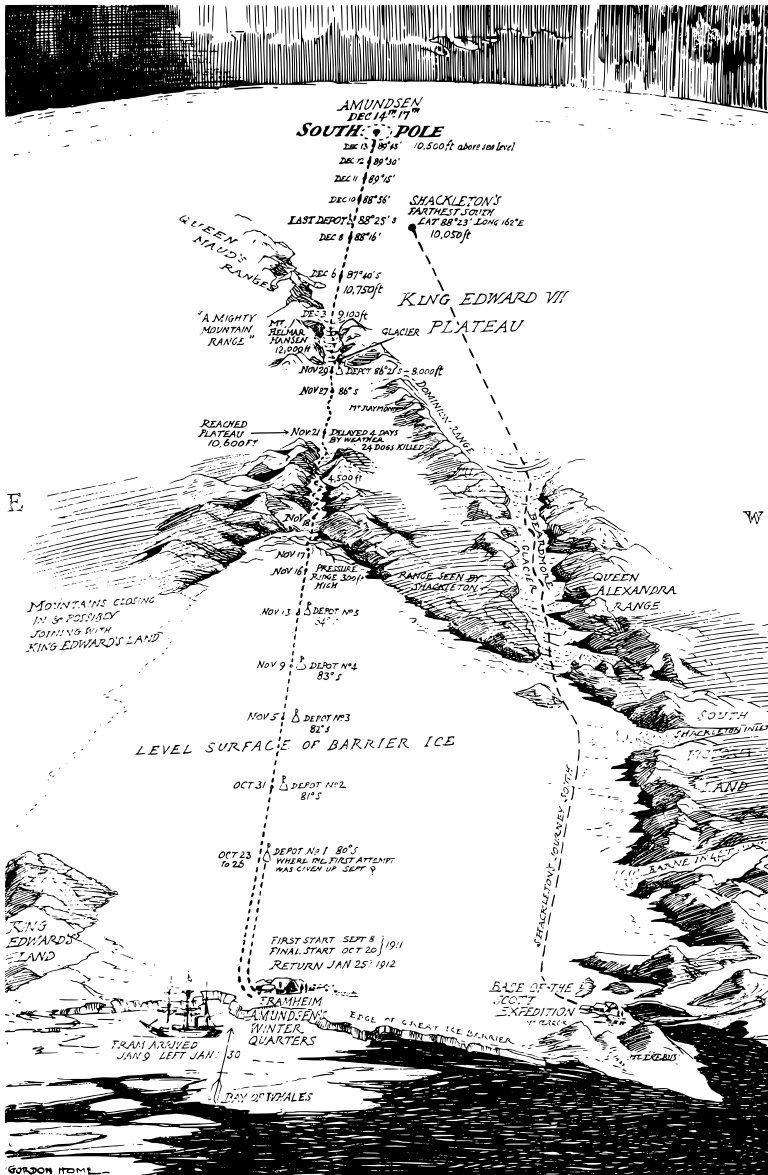
We left the Bay of Whales on January 30. We had a long voyage on account of contrary wind.

We are all in the best of health.

Roald Amundsen.

Hobart,

March 8, 1912.



Approximate Bird's-eye View, Drawn from the First Telegraphic Account.