

FROZEN FEELINGS



South

Thirst took possession of us. I dared not permit the allowance of water to be increased since an unfavourable wind might drive us away from the island and lengthen our voyage by many days. Lack of water is always the most severe privation that men can be condemned to endure, and we found, as during our earlier boat voyage, that the salt water in our clothing and the salt spray that lashed our faces made our thirst grow quickly to a burning pain. I had to be very firm in refusing to allow any one to anticipate the morrow's allowance, which I was sometimes begged to do. We did the necessary work dully and hoped for the land. I had altered the course to the east so as to make sure of our striking the island, which would have been impossible to regain if we had run past the northern end. The course was laid on our scrap of charge for a point some thirty miles down the coast.

That day and the following day passed for us in a sort of nightmare. Our mouths were dry and our tongues were swollen. The wind was still strong and the heavy sea forced us to navigate carefully, but any thought of our peril from the waves was buried beneath the consciousness of our raging thirst. The bright moments were those when we each received our one mug of hot milk during the long, bitter watches of the night. Things were bad for us in those days, but the end was coming. The morning of May 8 broke thick and stormy, with squalls from the north-west. We searched the waters ahead for a sign of land, and though we could see nothing more than had met our eyes for many days, we were cheered by a sense that the goal was near at hand. About ten o'clock that morning we passed a little bit of kelp, a glad signal of the proximity of land. An hour later we saw two shags sitting on a big mass of kelp, and knew then that we must be within ten or fifteen miles of the shore. These birds are as sure an indication of the proximity of land as a lighthouse is, for they never venture far to sea. We gazed ahead with increasing eagerness, and at 12.30 pm, through a rift in the clouds, McCarthy caught a glimpse of the black cliffs of South Georgia, just fourteen days after our departure from Elephant Island. It was a glad moment. Thirst-ridden, chilled, and weak as we were, happiness irradiated us. The job was nearly done.

We stood in towards the shore to look for a landing place, and presently we could see the green tussock-grass on the ledges above the surf-

beaten rocks. Ahead of us and to the south, blind rollers showed the presence of uncharted reefs along the coast. Here and there the hungry rocks were close to the surface, and over them the great waves broke, swirling viciously and spouting thirty and forty feet into the air. The rocky coast appeared to descend sheer to the sea. Our need of water and rest was well nigh desperate, but to have attempted a landing at that time would have been suicidal. Night was drawing near, and the weather indications were not favourable. There was nothing for it but to haul off till the following morning, so we stood away on the starboard tack until we had made what appeared to be a safe offing. Then we hove to in the high westerly swell. The hours passed slowly as we awaited the dawn, which would herald, we fondly hoped, the last stage of our journey. Our thirst was a torment and we could scarcely touch our food; the cold seemed to strike right through our weakened bodies. At 5 am the wind shifted to the north-west and quickly increased to one of the worst hurricanes any of us had ever experienced. A great cross-sea was running, and the wind simply shrieked as it tore the tops off the waves and converted the whole seascape into a haze of driving spray. Down into valleys, up to tossing heights, straining until her seams opened, swung our little boat, brave still but labouring heavily. We knew that the wind and set of the sea was driving us ashore, but we could do nothing. The dawn showed us a storm-torn ocean, and the morning passed without bringing us a sight of the land; but at 1 pm, through a rift in the flying mists, we got a glimpse of the huge crags of the island and realized that our position had become desperate. We were on a dead lee shore, and we could gauge our approach to the unseen cliffs by the roar of the breakers against the sheer walls of rock. I ordered the double-reefed mainsail to be set in the hope that we might claw off, and this attempt increased the strain upon the boat.

Extract from *Literacy through Texts 2* by *Shackleton*

POLE TO POLE

Dan, who looks like a plump Lee Marvin, learnt his flying in the USAF and later in Alaska. As we assemble our gear I catch him looking thoughtfully at the plane. I ask him if he knows the Pole well.

He scratches at a white-haired chin: "Never been there."

He must enjoy seeing my jaw move up and down, soundlessly, for his eyes have a twinkle as he adds:

"I'm from the north, I've come down south here for the winter...to enjoy the nice weather."

I try to make the best of it, tapping the side of the plane.

"Still, I'll bet this aircraft must have seen plenty of polar action..."

"Nope. This'll be the first trip for a single engine turbine Otter to the Pole."

It transpires that neither pilot nor aircraft, nor even Scott, our Adventure Network escort, has ever been to the Pole. We're all first-timers.

Now I know what Mike Sharp was talking about when he told me yesterday that Adventure Network's success was "based on enthusiasm ...really...We're an ex-company of adventurers that ... still want the adventure."

At 3.45 p.m. we say our farewells, not just to Patriot Hills, but to Basil and Patti, who have to stay behind. Though they have known this all along, it doesn't make it any easier to leave them so close to our final destination.

We squeeze into tiny seats, made smaller by the bulkiness of our clothing. It is rather like sitting at nursery school desks. We share the cabin with a drum of kerosene as well as camera, camping and catering equipment, pumps and ice shovels. The only empty space is the gangway, and that is soon filled with an aluminium ladder.

At 3.50 this tightly-packed collection of people and their props taxis out across the ribbed and rutted ice, turns, and begins the longest and most unconvincing take-off I've ever experienced. It's nothing to do with the pilot, who is completely unconcerned, it's just that the relentless bumping and buffeting of the aeroplane's skis over the sastrugis doesn't seem to be allowing us to gain momentum. The fragmented rock face of the Patriot Hills is approaching fast and my grip tightens on the seat in front. Then with two or three gazelle-like bounces we are airborne, and within seconds the waving group below become specks against the snow.

We are flying into what the locals call "the interior" - a flat plateau with few distinguishing features, rising from 4000 feet at Patriot Hills to an official 9348 feet at the Pole, though local atmospheric conditions there give a pressure altitude of 10,600 feet.

On the way we have to put down at the Thiel Mountains for a refuelling stop, and to give Dan time to drip some fuel for Kazama-San's expedition, which will pass nearby.

After two or three approaches as Dan and Scott search for the oil drums, we put down on the ice, at a spot called King's Peak. After two and a half hours sitting in the plane, unable to change position, it is a relief to clamber down onto the ice, even if it is into the teeth of a strong, biting cold wind.

Scott puts Rudy and myself to work, assembling a tent. It is, I'm sure, quite simple to those familiar with these matters, but I have never been a happy camper and the cluster of fibreglass rods spells nothing to me but confusion. Scott's patience is wholly commendable.

"They're all colour coded," he points out, a little tersely. This is no help as my sunglasses distort most colours completely.

After much grunting and groaning and wrestling hopelessly to combine precision assembly with thick polar gloves, we have the tent up and crawl inside to drink tea and coffee and nibble chocolate whilst we wait for Dan to return from dropping Kazama's fuel, some 50 miles away.

Of course, in the dim recesses of one's mind the awareness that we are in sub-zero temperatures 300 miles from the South Pole with no means of transport does cause a flickering of doubt. Not often can one's survival

be said to depend on one man, but the prospect of Dan not coming doesn't really bear thinking about.

The wind-driven snow licks around us. It must be infinitely worse out in the open, away from the protective barrier of King's Peak. All of us are more relieved than we care to show when the scarlet flash of the Otter comes around the mountain again.

Dan takes a last weather check with the Amundsen-Scott Base. As with Russ at the North Pole a great deal of responsibility rests on the pilot at times like this. Dan knows that there is no safe place, no fuel cache at which to land between here and the Pole. It's entirely up to him to evaluate the information and make the final decision. He decides we should go in.

11.30 p.m. We have seen the last of the rock-strewn slopes of the escarpment, now there is nothing but whiteness below in every direction. In front of me Clem settles to sleep. Dan has changed his sealskin hat for a baseball cap, held in place by his headset. Scott is concerned to know if any of us are feeling the effects of altitude - for we are the equivalent of 20,000 feet above sea-level, in an unpressurised plane. I sense that I am taking shorter breaths, but apart from that I feel good, bumped by the excitement of my situation from the tired, almost melancholy heaviness I felt as we sat at King's Peak an hour ago.

Extract from *Literacy through Texts* by *Michael Palin*.



Even today, after so many years of exploration, Antarctica still remains a world apart. It is a majestic last frontier which is beyond the expectations of even the most experienced travellers.

Until you have been there yourself, there are no words that do Antarctica justice. This desert of ice is so unique and uncommon to man's experience, that even the best of photographs are mere attempts at describing the sheer magnitude, the awe, the beauty of it. Such wonder can only be felt, not defined.

Today's traveller has the choice of sailing to Antarctica aboard a conventional cruise ship, along with perhaps three or four hundred other passengers, or joining a special expedition cruise ship which is normally a very expensive option. Now, for the first time, Noble Caledonia is offering the opportunity to visit Antarctica aboard a specially equipped Ice Breaker at a remarkably low price.

On board there are two helicopters which will be used for a bird's-eye view of the icescape and for landings at otherwise inaccessible places.

ANTARCTICA



A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY TO THE GREAT WHITE CONTINENT ABOARD A SPECIALLY CHARTERED ICE BREAKER



Built in 1981 in Finland by Wartisila, the world's leading constructor of Polar vessels, the "Khlebnikov" is a hugely powerful vessel, powered by diesel-electric motors with 22,000 horsepower. Designed for the job of keeping the ice lanes to the north of Siberia open in the winter, she has in the past year been converted and made suitable for western passengers.

The alterations have been made to a high standard. All the cabins are outside with private shower and toilet and well appointed. In general, the accommodation and public rooms can be described as offering a high level of comfort without being glitzy cruise luxury.

Facilities include a heated indoor pool, gymnasium, sauna, lecture room, lounge bar and single sitting restaurant. There is accommodation for up to 100 passengers.

The food on board is to a high standard, prepared by European chefs. In addition, there is a well stocked library and hospital with qualified physician. Also on board, there is the latest in electronic and satellite navigation and communication equipment as well as satellite derived ice chart recorders.