

SHACKLETON'S ENDURANCE

AN ANTARCTIC SURVIVAL STORY



JOANNA GROCHOWICZ

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JOANNA GROCHOWICZ


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Allen & Unwin

83 Alexander Street

Crows Nest NSW 2065

Australia

Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100

Email: info@allenandunwin.com

Web: www.allenandunwin.com



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IMPERIAL TRANS-ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

Trans-continental party

Sir Ernest Shackleton – Leader**

Frank Wild – Deputy***

Frank Hurley – Photographer*

Dr Alexander ‘Mack’ Macklin – Surgeon

George ‘Putty’ Marston – Artist*

Tom Crean – Second Officer**

The *Endurance*

Frank ‘The Skipper’ Worsley – Captain of the *Endurance*

Lionel Greenstreet – First Officer

Hubert Hudson – Navigator

Henry ‘Chippy’ McNish – Carpenter

Thomas Orde-Lees – Motor expert

Dr James 'Mick' McIlroy – Doctor
Lewis Rickinson – Chief Engineer
Alexander Kerr – Assistant Engineer
Charles Green – Cook
Perce Blackborow – Stowaway

Seamen:

William Bakewell
Alf Cheetham***
Ernie Holness
Walter How
Timothy McCarthy
Thomas McLeod*
John Vincent
William Stephenson

Scientists

James Wordie – Geologist and chief scientist
Robert Clark – Biologist
Leonard Hussey – Meteorologist
Reginald 'Jimmy' James – Physicist

* number of previous expeditions to Antarctica

THE CREW

Ernest Shackleton



Tom Crean



Reginald James



Frank Hurley



Perce Blackborow



James Wordie



Hubert Hudson



Alfred Cheetham



Lewis Rickinson



Robert Clark



Alexander Kerr



James McIlroy

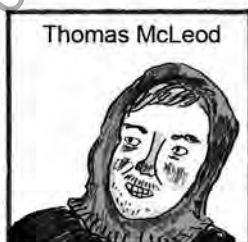
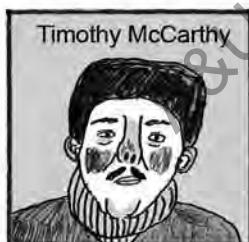
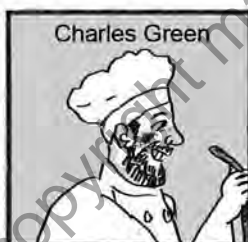
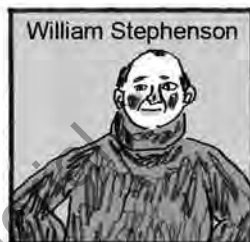
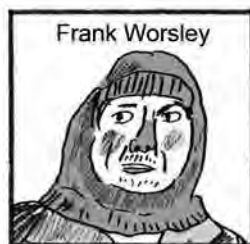
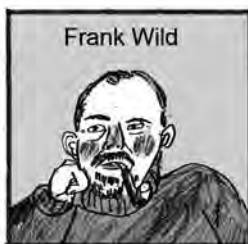


Alexander Macklin



Leonard Hussey





KEY DATES

1914

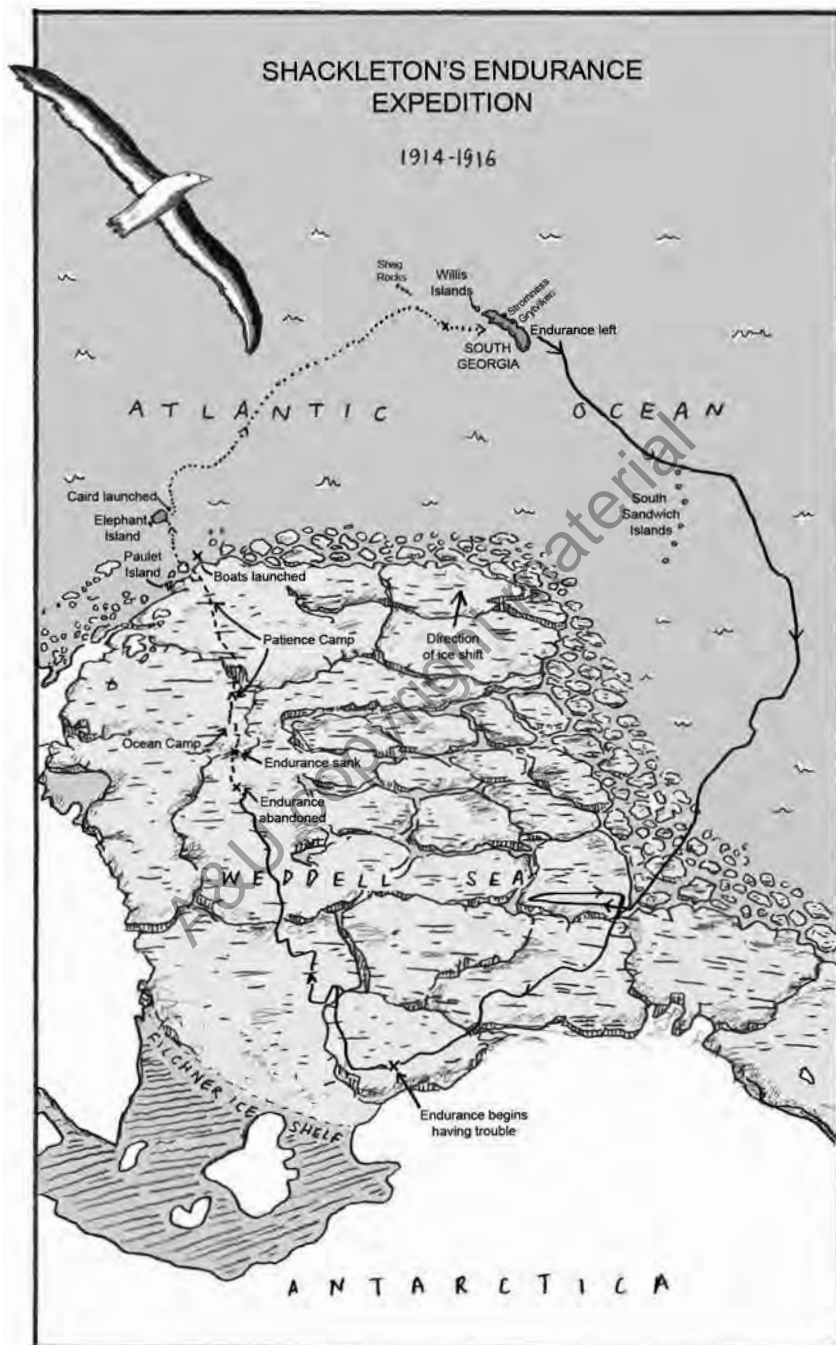
- 8 August – *Endurance* leaves Britain
- 26 October – *Endurance* leaves Buenos Aires
- 5 November – *Endurance* arrives in South Georgia
- 5 December – *Endurance* leaves South Georgia
- 30 December – *Endurance* crosses the Antarctic Circle

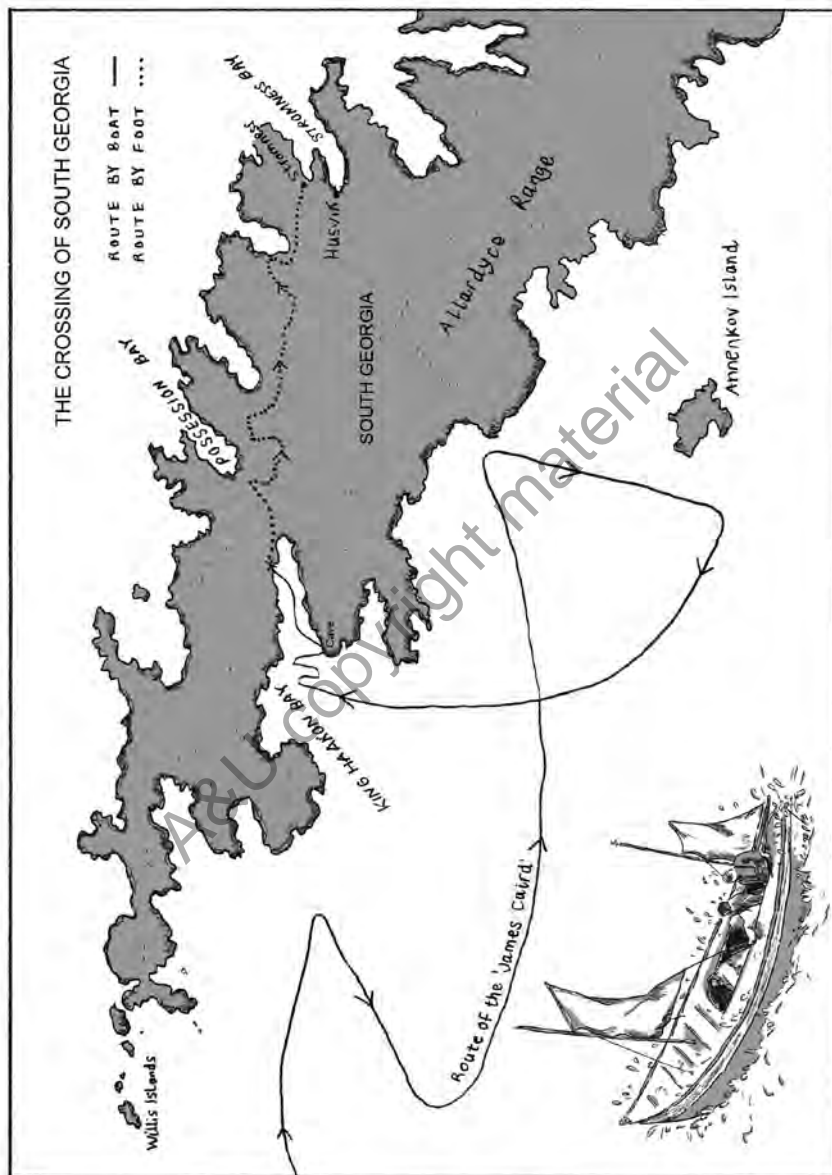
1915

- 19 January – *Endurance* is caught in ice
- 27 October – Shackleton gives the order to abandon ship
- 21 November – *Endurance* sinks
- 23 December – the men leave Ocean Camp
- 29 December – the men establish Patience Camp

1916

- 23 March – land is sighted from Patience Camp
- 9 April – the men take to the boats
- 15 April – the men reach Elephant Island (Cape Valentine)
- 17 April – the men relocate to Cape Wild
- 24 April – *James Caird* leaves Elephant Island
- 10 May – *James Caird* arrives in South Georgia
- 19 May – Shackleton, Worsley and Crean set off from King
Haakon Sound
- 20 May – Shackleton, Worsley and Crean arrive in
Stromness
- 23 May – *Southern Sky* leaves South Georgia
- 10 June – *Instituto de Pesca No 1* leaves the Falkland Islands
- 12 July – *Emma* leaves Punta Arenas
- 25 August – *Yelcho* leaves Punta Arenas
- 30 August – Shackleton, Worsley and Crean arrive in
Elephant Island aboard *Yelcho*





'THE LAST GREAT POLAR JOURNEY'

The explorer has known moments of great excitement and this is one of them. Failing to convey the sheer scale of his ambition in words, he takes up a pen and draws a map of the continent on the back of a menu. Nothing more than an empty circle. With a line drawn through it. This is the plan he shares at the geological society lunch.

'I believe it will take one hundred and twenty days,' he says. 'One short Antarctic summer.'

His assertion is met with raised eyebrows. The gentlemen at the lunch who might be persuaded to fund such a venture are intrigued but not yet convinced.

The game has changed. The pole has been conquered. Captain Scott is dead and Roald Amundsen is victorious. For so long Sir Ernest Shackleton imagined himself at 90 degrees south. But getting to the only place on earth where all directions point north is not enough now. Another more ambitious venture awaits: to cross the Antarctic continent from the Weddell Sea to the Ross Sea. At almost 3000 kilometres, it will be the 'last great polar journey to be made'. Much of the terrain they will cover is uncharted, probably pockmarked with obstacles. In his optimistic way, Shackleton hopes to finally leave his mark on the continent.

The fight will be a good one. Third time lucky. He knows from experience that planning takes years; finding money takes courage. Exploration costs a great deal and the 39-year-old explorer has no riches of his own. He has charm though, bags of it. Having dealt out a large amount of it over lunch, he leaves the function more determined than ever.

Next Shackleton applies his talents to securing the backing of prominent institutions, ingratiating himself with sponsors, gladhanding politicians, royalty and society ladies. Months of back slapping, asking favours, and making promises that he hopes to keep has left him exhausted and in poor health. But his efforts pay off with a fine ship, men, sledge dogs and enough provisions to last several years.

The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition sets sail from Britain on 8 August 1914, even as Germany enters into

conflict with Russia, then France, and general mobilisation is ordered in England. He feels obliged to offer his ship to the Royal Navy and release his men, but the Admiralty tells him to set sail for British glory. Nothing, not even the outbreak of world war, will hold Shackleton back.

The expedition is still short of funds and money must be borrowed. Shackleton wants his men's wages to go to their families during their long absence. Ultimately, any debts can be repaid by selling the story to the newspapers on his return. Everybody loves reading about daring individuals cheating death while they sip tea over breakfast. As it turns out there's money in suffering. Shackleton only hopes that on the 'last great polar journey' there will not be too much of it.

PART I

IDEALISM

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CHAPTER ONE



ARGENTINA, OCTOBER 1914

The Buenos Aires docks are a busy place. There's the usual activity of boats arriving and departing, fishing vessels offloading their catch, cargo ships undergoing repairs, others taking on supplies and crew. There's shouting in every language, bustle and muck, donkeys hitched to wooden carts and a stray dog looking for handouts but receiving a kick.

Aside from the odd malingerer, most of the men hanging around are looking for work. Their faces are haggard from toil and weather and fighting. Some are local, others are from as far away as the British Isles – hardy

seafarers, looking to work their passage home so they can sign up. A dose of ground warfare in Europe would make a nice change from doing battle in the Southern Seas.

Others can think of nothing worse than being stuck on dry land. They have sea fever. For them, life only has meaning if it can be spent in wind, on waves, sailing the deep. They long for fresh air and dream of adventure. One ship in particular captures their imagination. It's a British vessel, on its way to Antarctica. The dockside dreamers peer up at the *Endurance*, hoping for a glimpse of the polar hero. With his large square face, hair parted down the middle of his head, he's unmistakable. Sir Ernest Shackleton is often on deck arranging things, directing men, laughing like he hasn't a care in the world.

Down on the wharf, the chatter is a mix of fact and hearsay. 'What's he planning now?'

'To walk across Antarctica.'

'Been done.'

'No it hasn't. You're thinking of the south pole. That's only halfway across.'

'The Norwegian. He did it.'

'Yeah, and Scott died trying.'

'You wouldn't get me trying.'

'Or dying, trying.'

One young enthusiast, Perce Blackborow, has stopped Shackleton twice in the street to ask for work. Supposedly

eighteen years old, he doesn't look a day over fifteen. Perhaps that's why Shackleton always has a ready smile for him.

'I'm a hard worker and a quick learner,' Blackborow declares with force.

'Of course you are,' Shackleton replies warmly. 'But you're also too young.'

Two refusals and still Blackborow stands there, admiring the black hull of the *Endurance*, engaging whoever comes sauntering down the gangplank, hoping for an opportunity to prove his worth to 'the Boss', as everyone calls Shackleton. Mostly the boy is a figure of pity.

'Just look at the tragic expression on his face,' says one of the crew. 'Perhaps we should take the lad with us.'

'That'd be throwing him in the deep end,' says Frank Wild. 'He needs some hair on his chest before he heads south.'

Wild rolls up his shirtsleeves to reveal brown arms and merchant navy tattoos – a snake on one arm and an anchor on the other. Up until now Shackleton's second-in-command has had to content himself with managing expedition business from behind a desk. He'd far rather be here in the fresh air, manhandling crates and seeing to sledge dogs. But there are a few issues to sort out before they set sail for South Georgia and then Antarctica. The Boss, newly arrived from London, is not happy.

The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition is a shambles. The ship has a leak, there's no coal for the boilers nor a cook

for the galley, vital supplies are missing, and they're four sailors short. Worst of all, nobody seems concerned, not even the captain.

Unlike Frank Wild, Captain Frank 'The Skipper' Worsley has never been south. He certainly wasn't Shackleton's first choice, although he does have decades of experience on the sea. Frank Wild remembers the first time he met the unconventional New Zealander at the expedition offices in London. Worsley bounded in the door grinning, and proudly announced that he'd navigated a ship through ice on New Burlington Street in a dream and had come looking for a job there as soon as he woke up. Wild wasn't persuaded by the story but Worsley did show up at the right time to convince the Boss of his worthiness.

The captain's not the only questionable hire. There have been plenty of other arbitrary choices among those selected to take part in the expedition. Sometimes Wild looks around the deck at the hardened seafarers, the toffs, the merchant navy men, and the wet ones who have never ventured beyond a university campus, and wonders if a more mismatched group of individuals has ever been assembled.

When Worsley returns to the *Endurance* from his errand down on the docks, he raises both arms in triumph. After making a few enquiries on shore he's found Charles Green, a man he thinks can replace their old cook – the one who has just been fired for drunken behaviour. The captain hopes

the Boss approves of his choice. Options are few. To be sure, there are others who could do the job but very few of the men Worsley has spoken to are interested in going so far south. And on a voyage of such a duration.

‘Can you cook?’ Shackleton asks.

‘They seemed to think so.’ Green cocks his head in the direction of the cargo vessel at the end of the pier, a filthy rust-bucket of a thing.

‘How do you feel about the cold?’

Green shrugs. ‘Exactly the same way I feel about the wet.’

Shackleton is yet to meet a sailor who complains about getting a soaking. ‘Fix a few meals and if you don’t poison us with your cooking, you’ve got yourself a job.’

In typical Shackleton fashion, the interview is a short one.

Watching as yet another man is taken aboard the *Endurance*, Perce Blackborow thrusts his hands in his pockets. He’s taken up smoking, a habit he hoped would make him look manly, but it has done little beyond getting him on first-name terms with the crew. Most of these men are happy to help smoke the boy’s tobacco, but care little for his desire to join them on their polar escapade. The ship’s cat shows more genuine friendship.

Recognising Blackborow as a permanent fixture at the end of the gangplank, the cat twists its tortoiseshell

body between his legs. The young man likes the cat but he doesn't like the cat's owner. The ship's carpenter is an old curmudgeon with a broad Scottish accent. Everyone calls him Chippy, but he's really Henry McNish. The cat is utterly devoted to Chippy. Blackborow supposes that this is why the cat is called Mrs Chippy, although she is obviously a he. Blackborow may be inexperienced, but there's nothing wrong with his powers of observation.

It is a spring day in late October when the *Endurance* finally pulls away from the dock. Shackleton is impatient to be off, to leave behind the crowds of well-wishers, the Argentine officials, the brass band and its rambunctious medley, and his unresolved money worries. There are few perils in the southern wilds that he cannot face with confidence and yet so many sources of stress on dry land. Having felt so poorly in recent weeks, Shackleton longs for the fresh air of the open water to set him right. It always does. There are two doctors on board, but he has no intention of allowing either Dr Macklin or Dr McIlroy to examine him. Nothing good will come of it. This is a time for boldness, not cures.

South Georgia is their next and final stop. From there the *Endurance* will head south to the Weddell Sea, where men and stores will be dropped at Vahsel Bay on the Antarctic coast to commence their 3000-kilometre journey across the continent immediately.

For now, they have all they need: strong winds, a cloudless sky, and coal in reserve. After more than two weeks in Buenos Aires refitting the ship, everyone feels the excitement of the southern journey building. Even the sixty-nine sledge dogs, chained up to shipboard kennels, close their eyes against the sun and thrust their snouts windward in a way that can only express the deepest contentment.

Photographer Frank Hurley contemplates the horizon and wonders what adventures lie before him on this, his second voyage to Antarctica. His camera is already at work. *There's the book to consider*, he thinks with satisfaction, remembering how Shackleton pitched the idea of documenting their journey. What a thrill, to have been invited along by the polar hero. When he thinks of all he had to do to convince Douglas Mawson to take him on his Antarctic expedition in 1911. Offering to work without pay! How like that desperate lad standing by the gangplank in Buenos Aires.

The dogs are appealing subjects for the photographer and the *Endurance* is a beautiful ship when in full sail. The three-masted wooden vessel is sturdy but utterly reliant on her coal-powered steam engines. Originally built as tourist ship in Norway, she is not ideally suited to long voyages. The Boss says she's sluggish. He prefers his last ship, the *Nimrod*, and wonders if this one has what it takes to get through the pack ice. Now Shackleton is on board, the crew are hard at work and smile whenever they see Hurley's camera. The

scientists too are doing their part, learning the ropes and doing a passable job when not throwing up over the side. Everyone needs to pitch in when the ship is undermanned, all twenty-seven men, including the Boss.

There's another pair of hands, well hidden, but only discovered three days into the journey. When Blackborow is pulled from the fo'c'sle and the cries of '*Stowaway!*' ring out, most of the sailors are very pleased at the thought of extra help. The boy is seasick and horribly dehydrated but eager to prove his worth. Mostly he is pleased to finally be allowed out from the locker where a couple of well-intentioned sailors concealed him. On seeing the wide open sea, Blackborow beams with delight. Despite enduring a great deal of discomfort, the boy has not cracked or given himself up. He certainly hasn't revealed his accomplices. Such pluck is to be admired.

The Boss shouts: 'If we run out of food and someone has to be eaten, it will be you first! Do you understand?'

But it's all a grand show rather than genuine displeasure. In fact, the Boss must turn quickly away to hide a smile. He recognises himself in the lad. Given half a chance at that age, he'd have done exactly the same thing.