

Shackleton:

A Study in Leadership, Perseverance,
and Providence.



Introduction

Sir Ernest Shackleton, Tom Crean, and Frank Worsley “were barely recognizable when they arrived at the Stromness whaling station after an unprecedented thirty-six-hour struggle to cross the island of South Georgia. A whaler weeps at the sight of them.” With these words, authors Margot Morrell and Stephanie Capparell captured the precise moment when these three men came face-to-face with the station manager, who had just emerged to meet them. When asked who he was, Shackleton simply said, “My name is Shackleton.” A tough Norwegian whaler later said in broken English, “Me – I turn away and weep. I think manager weep, too.” The next night at dinner, “every man walked silently up to them and shook their hands.”



The Story of the *James Caird*

- On May 10, 1916, at 5:00 p.m., after a treacherous two-week journey, the *James Caird* landed on the south coast of South Georgia.
- To get to the Stromness whaling station by sea around the western tip of the island would have been a voyage of more than 130 miles. By land, it was 29 miles in a straight line. “The only difference between the two was that in the three-quarters of a century that men had been coming to South Georgia, not one man had ever crossed the island – for the simple reason that it could not be done” (A. Lansing).
- On May 15, 1916, at 8:00 a.m., the 6-man crew sailed to King Haakon Bay, a distance of about 6 miles, arriving at 12:30 p.m.

South Georgia Island

Alfred Lansing (1921-1975), the American journalist who published his bestselling book *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage* in 1959, recorded that "the interior of the island has been described by one expert as 'a saw-tooth thrust through the tortured upheaval of mountain and glacier that falls in chaos to the northern sea.' In short, it was impassible."



The Interior of South Georgia Island

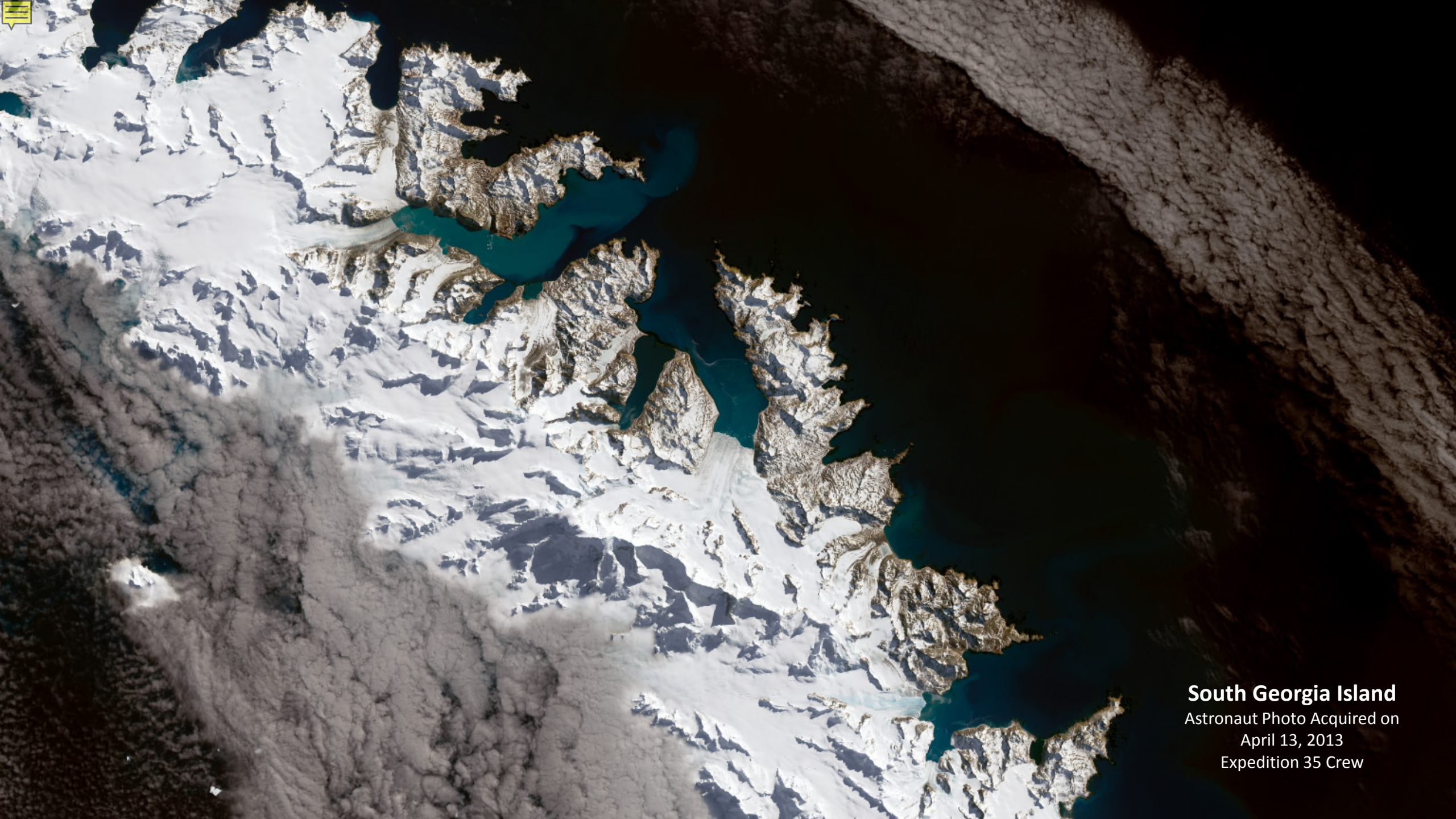


South Georgia Island

104 x 23 miles

NASA's Terra Satellite

September 29, 2012



South Georgia Island
Astronaut Photo Acquired on
April 13, 2013
Expedition 35 Crew



Shackleton's Gap

Pass between King Haakon Bay and
Possession Bay, South Georgia



The Reason They Had to Cross South Georgia

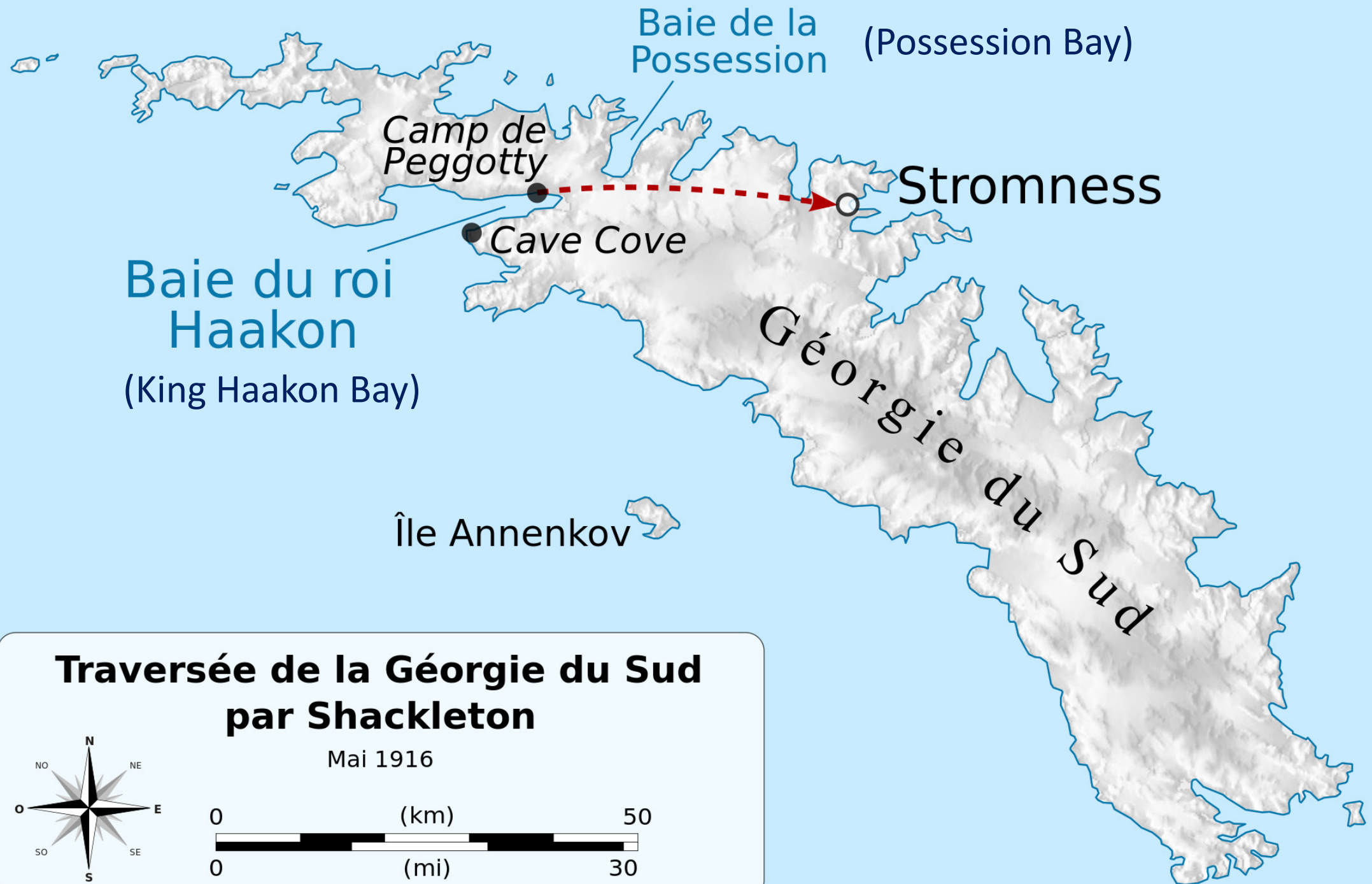
“King Haakon Sound is on the uninhabited west coast. The whaling stations were all on the east coast. The necessity for crossing for help, with winter on us, was the ever-present fear that our shipmates on Elephant Island might starve before even Shackleton’s feverish anxiety could save them, so we dared not wait for spring and the whalers. As we could not, with two enfeebled men, take our boat around South Georgia, there was nothing for it but the crossing.”

- Frank Worsley, Navigator of the *Endurance*



Their Twenty-Nine Mile Journey Begins

On Friday morning, May 19, at 3:00 a.m., Sir Ernest Shackleton, Captain Frank Worsley, and Thomas Crean, second officer on the *Endurance*, left Peggotty Camp (from Dicken's *David Copperfield*) by the bright light of the moon. Each man had three days' food "slung in a Burberry sock around our neck." Their gear consisted of a "small nine-inch aluminum cooker, binoculars, a small sledging compass, an adze with the handle cut down to one foot to cut steps into the ice, and about ninety feet of Alpine rope." In addition, Worsley, the navigator, carried two compasses, a chronometer, and a small piece of the German blueprint chart of South Georgia.





The Harrowing Journey Across South Georgia

- The first difficulty after leaving Peggotty Camp was getting around the edge of the snouted glacier, which had points like fingers projecting into the sea.
- They ascended a snow slope, sinking up to their ankles with each step.
- The interior of the island was “tremendously broken” (Shackleton): “High peaks, impassable cliffs, steep snow slopes, and sharply descending glaciers could be seen in all directions.”
- With the help of the moon, they “avoided a huge hole capable of swallowing an army.”



The Challenge of Hiking Across South Georgia

- A thick fog drifted down upon them, causing them to rope themselves together as “a precaution against holes, crevasses and precipices.”
- As they traveled on, they encountered crevasses, “which showed that we were on a glacier.”
- At the top of a razorback ridge, Shackleton looked down a sheer precipice to a chaos of crumpled ice 1,500 feet below. They had to cut steps with the adze, then retrace their steps down the long slope which had taken them three hours to climb.
- Then they skirted the base of the mountain and came to a gigantic gully, 1,000 feet deep and a mile and a half long.



The Challenge of Hiking Across South Georgia

- On a ridge at 4,500 feet, they had to get down before dark. The night temperature would be very low at that altitude. They could not see the bottom, and the fog was coming in. Taking a risk, they “slid in the fashion of youthful days.” They descended 900 feet in two or three minutes.
- At nightfall, they plodded on for an hour in almost complete darkness, “watching warily for signs of crevasses.”
- Shackleton: “The friendly moon seemed to pilot our weary feet. We could have had no better guide.”
- As they continued on, “crevasses warned us that we were on another glacier.”



The Challenge of Hiking Across South Georgia

- They came to a ridge with a very steep slope and went through a gap at 6:00 a.m. They were now about twelve miles away from Stromness Bay.
- At 6:30 a.m., Shackleton thought he heard the sound of a steam-whistle.
- At 7:00 the whistle would summon the whalers to work.
- The three men spent three hours descending from a snow slope and avoided “a perilous precipice.” Again, they slid down the slope and found themselves no more than 1,500 above sea level.
- As they continued on, they found that they were on top of a small, snow-covered lake.



The Challenge of Hiking Across South Georgia

- At 1:30 p.m. they climbed up the final ridge and saw a little steamer, a whaling boat. A few moments later, they saw the sheds and factories of Stromness whaling station. The men shook hands with one another.
- The last lap of the journey was extraordinarily difficult. Through icy waters – waist deep – they followed the course of a stream and came to a waterfall – and “we were at the wrong end.” They all slid down their rope and, once again, stood on dry land.

Arrival the Stromness Bay Whaling Station

“Sir Ernest asked me for the time. It was 6:55. He said, ‘We’ll listen for the whaling station’s whistle.’ Sure enough at seven, through the still morning air came the welcome sound of the turn-to whistles of the whaling station – the first sound we had heard of civilization for eighteen months.”

- Capt. Frank Worsley





“The Naked Soul of Man”

“The rope could not be recovered. We had flung down the adze from the top of the fall, and also the logbook wrapped in one of our blouses. That was all we brought, except our wet clothes, from the Antarctic, which a year and a half before we had entered with well-found ship, full equipment and high hopes. That was all of tangible things; but in memories we were rich. We had pierced the veneer of outside things. We had seen God in His splendors, we had heard the text that Nature renders. We had reached the naked soul of man.”

- Sir Ernest Shackleton



Shackleton: “Four, Not Three”

“When I look back at those days, I have no doubt that Providence guided us, not only across those snowfields, but across the storm-white sea that separated Elephant Island from our landing-place on South Georgia. I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia, it seemed to me often that we were four, not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterwards Worsley said to me, ‘Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was *Another Person* with us.’ Crean confessed to the same idea. One feels the inadequacy of human words, the inability of mortal speech in trying to describe things intangible, but a record of our journeys would be incomplete without a reference to a subject very near to our hearts.”



Providence

“After the bath, shave, and clothes, feeling clean, proud, and happy, we had a royal dinner with our host, Captain Sorlee. Soon after I went on board the whaler *Samson*, to go back to King Haakon Sound and get the three men we had left under the boat. As I lay down to sleep in a comfortable bunk, with clear sheets, the whaler was steaming out of Stromness Bay. It was nine o’clock, and the last sound I heard was a rising southeast gale, which blew all night, beginning five or six hours after we had got through. Had we been crossing that night nothing could have saved us. The Norwegians afterwards told us there was never another day during the rest of the winter that was fine enough for us to have lived through on top of the mountains.

Providence



Frank A. Worsley
1872-1943
Captain of the *Endurance*

“Providence had certainly looked after us. Three or four weeks afterwards Sir Ernest and I, comparing notes, found that we each had a strange feeling that there had been a fourth in our party, and Crean afterwards confessed to the same feeling.”

T.S. Eliot: *The Wasteland*



T.S. Eliot
1888-1965

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you.
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
- But who is that on the other side of you?

[Inspired by Shackleton's account in *South*]

The Invisible Hand



Blaise Pascal
1623-1662

“Everything that is incomprehensible
does not cease to exist.”

- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, #230

God With Us

- “And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But **the Lord was with Joseph** and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Gen. 39:20; 23).
- “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the **Lord your God who goes with you**. He will not leave you or forsake you” (Deut. 31:6).
- “Just as I was with Moses, so **I will be with you**. I will not leave you or forsake you” (Josh. 1:5).



God With Us

- “When you pass through the waters, **I will be with you**; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Is. 43:2).
- “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for **you are with me**” (Ps. 23:4).
- “For He Himself has said, ‘**I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you**’” (Hb. 13:5). “In this particular line five negatives appear. The Greek cannot express the idea any more forcefully” (Kistemaker).



God With Us

- “What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us**, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:31-32).
- J.I. Packer comments: “What is being proclaimed here is God’s undertaking to uphold and protect us when men and things are threatening, to provide for us as long as our earthly pilgrimage lasts, and to lead us finally into the full enjoyment of Himself, however many obstacles may seem at present to stand in the way of our getting there. The simple statement, ‘God is for us,’ is in truth one of the richest and weightiest utterances that the Bible contains.”

How Firm a Foundation

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no never forsake.

A Gramophone Record for His Last Expedition

Frank W. Boreham tells us that before leaving England for the last time, Shackleton delivered an address in which he repeated his testimony concerning his Unseen Comrade. He then quoted the words from Psalm 139:9-10. *“If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”* On his last journey, Shackleton took a gramophone record of Dame Clara Butt’s rendering of *Abide with Me*.



Abide With Me

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide:
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies:
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee:
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

The Providence of God

“God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.”

- *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 5

R.C. Sproul on *Providence*

“If we understand the providence of God and love the God of providence, we are able to worship Him with the sacrifice of praise He inherently deserves when things occur that bring pain, sorrow, and affliction into our lives. This understanding of providence is vital to all who would worship God. It is a worship of faith that is rooted in trust.”



R. C. Sproul
1939-2017