

SOUTH

A documentary of 81 mins from 1919, Written and Directed by Frank Hurley

Featuring:

Sir Ernest Shackleton; Captain F Worsley; Lieutenant J Stenhouse; Captain L Hussey; Dr McIlroy; Mr Wordie; Dr Macklin; Captain Frank Wild; Tom Crean

There is a story, almost certainly apocryphal, for it has never been found, that the following advertisement appeared in a London newspaper in 1913.

“MEN WANTED FOR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY

Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.”

This was how Ernest Shackleton, the charismatic Anglo-Irish explorer, was said to have advertised for crew to accompany him on the *Endurance* to sail to Antarctica and attempt the first land crossing of the continent via the South Pole.

In fact, the simple announcement that he was planning the expedition attracted an overwhelming response.

In the end, the 27 men who sailed with Shackleton on the *Endurance* would become renowned not for a triumph of discovery but for their survival against all the odds. First, their ship was caught tight in the pack ice and eventually sank. Then, after months of living on the ice, they made the extremely difficult voyage in three open lifeboats to desolate Elephant Island, where they fought the elements, starvation, boredom and despair before they were finally rescued.

But it was the astonishing leadership of Ernest Shackleton that saw them through. Not only did he maintain his crew as a cohesive unit in the toughest of conditions, but he and five others undertook what is now considered one of the most dangerous small boat voyages in history in order to get help. Finally, after reaching South Georgia, Shackleton and two other men made an astonishing trek across the uncharted mountainous interior of the island to reach the whaling station of Stromness.

The recent Channel 4 film starring Kenneth Branagh which dramatised the events, once again reminded the British public of the bravery shown by all who undertook the adventure, which was less than one hundred years ago, something that is perhaps difficult to appreciate in an age when man has travelled to the moon and supersonic flight was possible.

In 2000, around 200 guests gathered at the Port of Hull on 13 May to welcome home the Royal Research Ship *Ernest Shackleton* following her highly successful first voyage for the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). The Honourable Alexandra Shackleton, granddaughter of the famous explorer, renamed the ship, formerly registered as *Polar Queen*, in a fitting tribute to the vessel's namesake.

The following is an extract from her speech that day:

“The British Film Institute have spent several years restoring the original 1916 cine film of the *Endurance* expedition. It has been made into a video called *South* and I have just heard via the British Film Institute that Amazon.com which records video sales, said that *South* is at number four in the US.

Why? Why Ernest Shackleton? Why is an explorer who died nearly eighty years ago evoking so much interest today? Well, I have thought about this, because I do get asked, and I believe that there seems to be a need to identify with what I call raw leadership, by which I mean leadership not as a learned self-conscious manipulative skill, but as a quality that stems directly from the sort of person one is; and to Ernest Shackleton it was natural to put his men first."

"The achievements of the *Endurance* expeditions are well known: the 800 mile voyage of the tiny *James Caird* to South Georgia, then the trek over its unmapped interior to the whaling station at Stromness. But I am just as proud of a decision he took during the *Nimrod* expedition. He could have been the first man at the South Pole, but he turned back because he could not be sure of bringing his men home safely. Afterwards he wrote to my Grandmother Emily: "Darling, I thought you would rather have a live donkey than a dead lion." And she wrote back: "Yes Darling, I would." I am with her on that."

.....

Frank Hurley

Born: 15 October 1885,
Sydney, New South Wales

Died: 169 January 1962,
Sydney



This film by Frank Hurley documents the British Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914-16, which ended in "glorious failure" for quest leader Ernest Shackleton, and the 27-man crew of doomed ship *Endurance*. They hatched an ambitious plan to cross the cold continent by dogsled, but the journey turned into a great escape from "white warfare" of the harsh winter, and the grave boredom of polar nights. It was the third mission to the South Pole and, despite his impatience with financial realities, Shackleton realised that a commercial film of his epic outing would recoup some of the scheme's considerable expenses. But, sadly, although he returned home to a hero's welcome, the public was indifferent to the initial release of **South**, due to the troubles of the First World War.

Restored by the National Film & Television Archive, this unique documentary shows part of the hopeful voyage to Antarctica before the ship became stuck in ice floes, drifting back north for several months. Hurley bravely captured images of the ship's prow breaking through pack ice, and flash photographs of the 'ghost' ship frozen in place are haunting. However, adversity followed disaster when Shackleton's team were forced to abandon the *Endurance* to pitch camp on the ice, and there's a poignant gloom in the scenes of their ship being slowly crushed. Although the entire crew made it dry land safely, we don't see very much of what happened next because Hurley was forced to abandon his bulky cine camera. Most of the film's second half consists of stills and paintings except for the wildlife sequences added later to please a public more interested in seeing penguins than human achievement. This is highly ironic because the expedition's 69 sledge dogs, plus at least one litter of cute pups born at sea, were eventually all shot and eaten - so perhaps this film is not really suitable for animal lovers.

An independent-minded Australian, Hurley ran away from home at age 13, working in an ironworks and the Sydney dockyards before becoming being introduced to the magic of making photographs, when employed by the Telegraph Department. Later he wrote in a diary "From the time I first gazed wonderingly at the miracle of chemical reaction on the latent image during the process of development, I knew I had found my real work, and a

key. Could I but become its master, that would perhaps unlock the portals of the undiscovered World."

His path from amateur to professional was rapid, as his skills developed with the exploding postcard business of Sydney.

He was appointed as a photographer for the first Australian scientific expedition of the Antarctic in 1911. This returned in 1913 and he was soon appointed to join Shackleton's expedition.

He subsequently had a successful career in photography and publishing and indeed was active until his death in 1962 aged 78.

Shackleton described him as a "Prince among men". His determination to capture the progress of the expedition on film was remarkable. Indeed right up until the final moment before the rescue of himself and the other crew, he was alert, with only three exposures of film left, ready with his camera to record the event.

Throughout the unfolding drama, members of the crew commented on his dedication, his absolute involvement in his work, to the extent that he would rather take photographs than play football.

You will see that the photographic quality is superb. You then realise that the photos were taken nearly a century ago. But when you learn that the glass plate negatives survived an 800 mile journey in the roughest seas in the world in a small fishing boat barely able to accommodate 6 men, their quality simply defies belief.

We are indebted of course to the crew that they still exist, for there must have been many occasions during their struggle when lugging the weight of the glass plates and film must have appeared secondary to their survival.

Tonight's film is a remarkable tribute to Frank Hurley and the other 27 brave men who undertook an amazing journey.

Iain McGlashan