

Fireside Tales

The Worst Journey in the World

Chapter 2 – The Journey Begins

TRANSCRIPT

When the scientist Dr Wilson visited the Emperor Penguin colony in 1902, he wanted to collect eggs for research. However, there were no eggs and the young birds were already quite big. He realised a very surprising fact; the penguins must lay their eggs in the middle of the Antarctic winter. To get an egg, he had to visit the colony in mid-winter. However, nobody had ever travelled in the Antarctic at that time of year! The sea was frozen, so travel by ship was impossible. The only possibility was to walk.

In mid-winter 1911, he started the 108km journey from the expedition base to the penguin colony. It was a very dangerous project. Wilson took two companions, 28-year-old Navy officer Henry Bowers and 24-year-old volunteer Cherry Garrard. They pulled two 2.75-metre sledges loaded with 343 kilos of food, paraffin and equipment for camping, cooking and scientific research.

The team walked south and then east around the volcanos Mt Erebus and Mt Terror. Sometimes, the moon or the Aurora lit up the sky, but usually it was completely dark. The sun was far below the horizon. Day and night were the same. They had no torches, just matches and candles. When the planet Jupiter was visible, it helped them to navigate.

The first few days were across the frozen sea. The sledges moved easily on the sea-ice. When they climbed up onto the polar ice, a strong wind came from the south. The temperature fell to -44°C. Garrard took off his gloves for a few minutes to pull a sledge up an ice cliff. All ten of his fingers were frostbitten. It took hours to restore his blood circulation. That night the temperature fell to -49°C. Shivering violently in their sleeping bags, it was hard to sleep. They did not believe they could reach the penguin colony. Dr Wilson asked the others if they wanted to go back. In Part three we'll hear what happened next.

GLOSSARY

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| Visit | to go somewhere and stay there for a short time |
| Mid-winter | the middle of the winter (In Antarctica, the months June and July) |
| Frozen | Sub-zero. Below 0 degrees Celsius. The sea water has become solid ice. |
| Impossible | it cannot happen |
| Project | plan, objective, venture |
| Companion | a person who goes/travels with you |
| Navy Officer | a leader in the British Royal Navy (military on the sea) |
| Volunteer | someone who agrees to do something with no payment |
| Pull | drag, use force to make the sledge move behind you |
| Sledge | a vehicle with metal runners to move on ice |
| Load | all the things/weight carried on the sledge |
| Equipment | tools, (things needed and used by the explorers) |
| Paraffin | kerosene; a hydrocarbon fuel made from petroleum |
| Camping | putting up a tent for shelter from the weather |
| Cooking | using paraffin to heat food and drink |
| Volcano | a mountain which releases gas and lava from inside the planet |
| Aurora | a natural light display in the sky in the Arctic (Aurora Borealis, the Northern lights) and Antarctic (Aurora Australis, the Southern Lights) |
| Horizon | skyline; the line between earth and sky |
| Torch | a flashlight (USA); small electric light used to see in the dark |
| Match | a tool used to start a fire |
| Candle | a long piece of wax which is burned to give light |
| Planet | a very large object going around the sun (Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Earth etc) |
| Visible | possible to see |
| Navigate | find the correct way/route |
| Polar ice | very thick (100s or 1000s metres) ice on land or sea, still connected to the continent. The polar ice crossed by this expedition is also known as "Barrier" or "Shelf" ice. |
| Wind | moving air caused by differences in air pressure from one place to another |

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| Temperature | how cold or hot it is; measured in degrees Celsius/(Centigrade) or Fahrenheit (USA) |
| Celsius | a measurement of temperature above or below zero (water freezes at 0 degrees C) |
| Gloves | mittens; covers to protect the hands |
| Frostbite | injury/damage to the body caused by extreme cold |
| Restore blood circulation | cause blood to move again in cold hands/feet to fight frostbite |
| Shiver violently | the body shakes strongly because it is very cold |
| Believe | to think something is true/correct even without evidence or proof |
| Sleeping bag | a bag made of insulated material to keep a person warm when sleeping |
| Reach | to get to or arrive at the place you wanted to get to... your destination. |