

Fireside Tales

The Worst Journey in the World

Chapter 3 – Trial by Ice

TRANSCRIPT

In the winter of 1911, Wilson, Bowers and Garrard struggled on through the Antarctic winter darkness on their ambitious journey to collect Emperor Penguin eggs.

The conditions were terrible, but nobody wanted to turn back. Frostbite was a big risk in the extreme cold. Frequent stops were needed to restore blood circulation. When their feet froze, they had to put up the tent. This took a long time because they had to handle the ropes with thick gloves on. Breath froze into sheets of ice on their faces. Sweat froze in their woollen clothes and in their sleeping bags. Garrard couldn't see clearly because his breath froze instantly on his glasses.

The snow became deep and soft. Every step sank into the snow and it was difficult to pull the sledges. They had to pull one sledge forward, then follow their tracks back by candlelight to get the other sledge. In this way, each kilometre forward needed three kilometres of travel. Often eight hours of pulling only resulted in two or three kilometres progress. Nine hours a day were spent putting up and taking down the tent, trying to light the cooker, eating and drinking, trying to get into frozen sleeping bags. There were seven mostly sleepless hours shivering in their sleeping bags.

The temperature fluctuated between -40°C and -61°C. Sometimes there were blizzards, with strong winds and blown snow reducing visibility to nothing. In a blizzard, the temperature rose dramatically. The ice melted in their clothes and sleeping bags, making them very wet. They had to stay in the tent, sometimes for days, until the blizzard stopped. When their clothes and sleeping bags froze again, they became stiff like wooden boards. At last, the snow conditions improved. Now they could pull both sledges together again.

After many days of fog and total darkness, the moon appeared suddenly. There was a huge crevasse only three steps ahead! In Part four, we will find out what happened next.

GLOSSARY

Struggle	make strong efforts although it is very difficult
Ambitious	the goal/target/aim/objective is very difficult to achieve/reach
Terrible	very bad
Turn back	change direction to go back to where you came from
Risk	danger
Frequent	very often
Tent	a temporary canvas shelter that you 'put up' and 'take down' when camping
Ropes	long flexible cords used to tie things on the sledge, put up the tent etc.
Handle	to use your hands to touch/manipulate something
Breath	the air that comes into and goes out of your body/lungs through nose and mouth
Sheets of ice	large flat pieces of ice
Sweat	the moisture/water that comes out of your skin when you exercise or get hot
Woollen clothes	jackets, trousers, socks etc made from the wool of a sheep
Glasses	spectacles; frame and glass lenses to help you to see correctly
Soft	not hard; in this case, powder snow
Sink in	their feet went deep into the snow with each step, making it difficult to walk
Tracks	marks in the snow left by their feet (footprints) and by the sledge runners
Follow	go after / use as a guide
Progress	forward movement
Light the cooker	use a match to start the equipment used to heat the food
Try	make effort
Fluctuate	go up and down, sometimes warmer, sometimes colder
Minus	sub/below zero degrees
Blizzard	a storm with strong winds, snow and bad visibility
Blown snow	snow blowing in the wind, causing poor/low/bad visibility
Rise dramatically	go up very strongly

Melt	snow/ice becomes water when it melts
Stay	not go/leave
Stiff as a board	not flexible. The frozen sleeping bags were flat/rigid like a wooden board
Snow conditions	the snow was harder so they didn't sink into it. It was easier to walk
Fog	water droplets or ice crystals in the air causing bad visibility
Moon appeared	the moon came out from behind the clouds giving better visibility
Crevasse	a large, often deep and dangerous crack in the ice that you can fall into. Sometimes they are open and easy to see. Sometimes they are hidden by a thin layer of snow that you could fall through.
Ahead	in front