

Fireside Tales

The Worst Journey in the World

Chapter 4 – At the Colony

TRANSCRIPT

Still 35 kilometres from the Emperor Penguin colony, Wilson, Bowers and Garrard came to an area where the polar ice pushed up against the volcanos Erebus and Terror. There were crevasses everywhere, huge cracks in the ice. It was difficult to get through the crevasses in the dark. They felt their way by the sound of their feet on the snow and ice. Often, they got lost and had to retrace their steps.

Finally, after 19 days and 108 kilometres, they looked down on the penguin colony from the side of the volcano. It was a big surprise. There were only about 100 birds on the frozen sea ice. The birds were standing close together to keep warm.

The explorers took two days to build a hut, using rocks, blocks of snow and a sledge. They put up the tent in front of the hut. The climb down to the penguin colony was very difficult. There were a lot of deep crevasses. After many hours, the way was blocked by a vertical cliff and they had to return to the hut. The next day, they tried again and at last reached the birds.

The male penguins incubate the eggs on their feet to keep them warm. Each egg is about 13 centimetres long and eight centimetres wide. The birds don't eat for over two months while the females are away at sea. This is the only bird that nests in the southern winter. Its predators, such as Orcas and Leopard Seals, are far away to the north at this time of the year.

Wilson, Bowers and Garrard took five eggs, but as they climbed back up through the crevasses, Garrard slipped and fell. In Part five, we will discover what happened next.

GLOSSARY

Polar Ice	Also known as Shelf/Barrier Ice in this part of Antarctica. This ice is 100s of metres thick and may rest on land or sea. It forms a cliff 100s of kilometres long (the Barrier) where it meets the frozen sea. In most of Antarctica, Polar Ice means the Ice Cap, which is often 1000s of metres thick. Polar means “of the Pole”.
Push up against	The polar ice is moving North, but the volcanos are in its way. The movement and pressure cause large areas of crevasses to form.
Get through	Reach the other side
Felt their way	Move slowly and carefully using sound and feeling to find the way
Retrace their steps	Go back the way they came
Finally	At last. After long effort.
Hut	A small building to get better shelter from the weather than a tent gives. When they arrived at the colony, the explorers planned to stay at the colony for a longer time, maybe a week or more.
The way was blocked	They could not go forward.
Vertical	At 90 degrees to the horizon. Perpendicular.
Incubate	Keep an egg warm so the embryo inside stays alive and grows. Male Emperor Penguins rest their egg on their feet to keep it off the ice.
To nest	Penguins don't make a nest. This means 'to breed', to produce eggs and young.
Orca	Also called “Killer Whale”. Two other predators of penguin eggs and young birds are the South Polar Skua and the Giant Petrel, both predatory seabirds. Because they nest in midwinter, Emperor Penguin chicks are safe from these predators, which move far to the north in winter.