

Fireside Tales

The Worst Journey in the World

Chapter 6 – Bringing the Story Up-To-Date

TRANSCRIPT

In Parts one to five, we told you the story of “The worst journey in the world”. In 1911, Edward Wilson, Henry Bowers and Cherry Garrard walked 216 kilometres through the Antarctic night in temperatures as low as -61°C. Why did they do it? For scientific knowledge. What happened next?

Six months after they collected the penguin eggs, Dr Edward Wilson and Lieutenant Henry Bowers reached the South Pole with expedition leader Robert Scott and two other men, Titus Oates and Edgar Evans. All of them died on the return journey. They ran out of food in a nine-day blizzard and froze to death in their tent. Roald Amundsen’s Norwegian expedition reached the Pole one month before them. Cherry Garrard returned to Britain and presented the three eggs to the Natural History Museum in London. He survived the First World War and published the book “The worst journey in the world” in 1922.

Science has made huge progress over the last 100 years. We now know that penguins are not the link between dinosaurs and birds as scientists once thought. In fact, they evolved from flying birds. Because of this, the eggs that Wilson, Bowers and Garrard suffered so much to get, do not tell us much about the evolution of birds from dinosaurs. We also know from satellite photography that there are about 45 colonies of Emperor Penguins in Antarctica, with a total population of 595,000 birds. The number of penguins at each colony fluctuates over the years.

Scientists working in Antarctica today are much better equipped and supported than Edward Wilson was in 1911, but there is still much to learn about Emperor Penguins. Despite their isolated home, these penguins, and all Antarctic wildlife, are at risk from climate change, industrial-scale fishing and tourism.

Penguin and I hope you enjoyed this fireside chat.

Goodbye.

GLOSSARY

Scientific knowledge	what we know as a result of using science.
Ran out of food	they had no food left. They had eaten all of their supplies. They died just 11 miles short of their next supply depot.
Froze to death	they died of cold.
Presented	gave
Published	he wrote the book and it was produced, printed and sold to the public.
Huge progress	very big progress
Link	connection
Evolved from flying birds	penguins evolved in New Zealand where they had no predators. Like many birds there, they stopped flying because they did not need to escape from predators.
Suffered	experienced mental and/or physical pain
Satellite photography	taking photographs from satellites in space
Population	total number of birds
Fluctuates	goes up and down
Better equipped...	scientists and other Antarctic travellers today have very high technology clothing and accommodation, satellite communications and navigation, high quality food and medicine, and sometimes air support.
Despite	In spite of / even though
Isolated	a long way from anywhere else
Wildlife	birds, animals, plants etc.
At risk	in danger
Climate change	global warming leads to sea level rise, which causes glaciers and shelf/barrier ice to float and more icebergs to break away. It is not yet clear how this will affect Emperor Penguin colonies.
Industrial scale fishing	fishing fleets from some countries, especially Russia, Norway, China and South Korea, have started to take Krill from Antarctic waters in very large quantities for human food and for fish farming. Krill is the base of the food chain, eaten by all fish, seals, whales and birds. If humans take too much there will not be enough for the wildlife.
Tourism	the number of tourists visiting Antarctica has increased dramatically in the 21st century, risking oil spill accidents, contamination and disturbance at colonies.
Enjoyed	experienced pleasure

Further reading

Cherry-Garrard, Apsley *The Worst Journey in the World* Vintage (2010) (First published 1922)

Matthiessen, Peter *End of the Earth* (2003) National Geographic Society

Harrison, Peter *Seabirds: An Identification Guide* (1985 Revised Edition) Christopher Helm