

Some Canadians in the Antarctic

G. HATTERSLEY-SMITH¹

(Received 18 February 1986; accepted in revised form 11 July 1986)

ABSTRACT. The note shows that individual Canadians have been involved in every phase of Antarctic exploration and research from 1898 to the present time.

Key words: Antarctic, expeditions

RÉSUMÉ. Cette note montre que des citoyens canadiens ont été impliqués dans toutes les phases de l'exploration et de la recherche antarctiques de 1898 à nos jours.

Mots clés: antarctique, expédition

Traduit pour le journal par Nésida Loyer.

As a country Canada has never been active in the Antarctic (except on the one occasion mentioned at the end of this note), but individual Canadians have made distinguished, in some cases heroic, contributions to Antarctic exploration and research. I have picked a number of such Canadians — the list is by no means exhaustive — who span the period from 1898 to the present time. Three of those chosen, although born in the U.K., came to Canada as young men and set forth on their expeditions from Canada; the rest were born in Canada.

The Antarctic mainland was discovered in 1820 in the northern part of what is now the British Antarctic Territory. Sealers were active in this area in succeeding years, including Newfoundland and Nova Scotia sealers in the period 1894-1912. There were also several important exploratory voyages around other parts of the continent in the 19th century, but it was not until 1898 that an expedition wintered on the mainland. This was the *Southern Cross Expedition*, 1898-1900, to the Ross Sea area, and among those who wintered at Cape Adare was the expedition naturalist Hugh Blackwall Evans (1874-1975) (Fig. 1), a pioneer in western Canada who had already taken part in a sealing expedition to Îles Kerguelen in 1897-98. Following his return to Canada in 1901, he spent the rest of his long life on his farm near Vermilion, Alberta.

The *Southern Cross Expedition* heralded a rush to the Antarctic by several nations, leading to the race for the South Pole. The names of Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen and others became familiar in the press. At least two Canadians took part in expeditions of that time. The late W.A. Rupert Michell served as ship's surgeon on Shackleton's *Nimrod Expedition*, 1907-09. He played a useful though inconspicuous part on both the outgoing and relief voyages of the ship on that heroic enterprise, which brought Shackleton to within 100 miles of the South Pole. On Scott's ill-fated *Terra-Nova Expedition*, 1910-13, Charles Seymour Wright (1887-1974) (Fig. 2) was a key member of the shore party as assistant physicist. Man-hauling was still the order of the day, and Wright played his sterling part as a member of one of the support parties for Scott's polar journey. If, as an expert navigator but against Scott's implicit orders, he had been sent out in charge of the relief party later in the season, the outcome of the polar journey might have been different. As it was, the following season he navigated the search party that found Scott's last camp. Wright, who was director of the Royal



FIG. 1. Hugh Blackwall Evans. This photograph of the expedition naturalist is taken from C.E. Borchgrevink's *First on the Antarctic continent, being an account of the British Antarctic Expedition, 1898-1900* (London, George Newnes, Ltd, 1901).

Naval Scientific Service throughout World War II, revisited the Antarctic as a research physicist with the Americans in 1960 and 1965.

After World War I Shackleton tried to organize an expedition to the Canadian Arctic, but his plans fell through and he went to the Antarctic instead. The *Quest Expedition*, 1921-22, had as its chief scientist George Vibert Douglas (1892-1958), later professor of geology at Dalhousie University. Following Shackleton's death at South Georgia, 5 January 1922, Douglas had the sad task of erecting a memorial cross at the entrance to Grytviken, making sure that it faced the South Magnetic Pole,

¹The Crossways, Cranbrook, Kent TN17, 2AG, England
©The Arctic Institute of North America

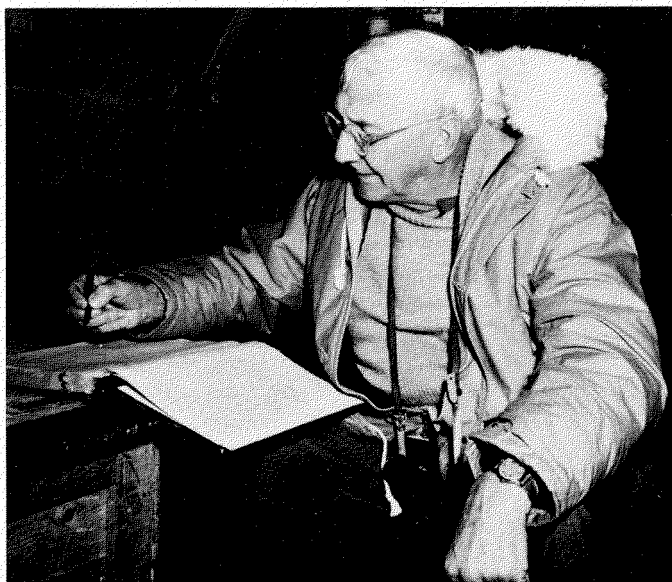


FIG. 2. Sir Charles Wright, KCB, OBE, MC, physicist, British Antarctic (*Terra Nova*) Expedition, 1910-13, photographed in 1960 signing the visitors' book in Captain Scott's hut at Cape Evans.

which Shackleton's men had discovered, before the expedition continued with its work in the Southern Ocean.

With the advent of aircraft to the Antarctic in the 1920s, Canadian pilots played an important role in pioneer flights. For his expedition of 1929-30 Hubert Wilkins chose as his pilot Silas Alward Cheesman (1900-58), and together they made the first flight down the west coast of Graham Land to Alexander Island. Then, for his historic trans-Antarctic flight from Graham Land to the Ross Sea in 1935, the American explorer Lincoln Ellsworth chose as his pilot Herbert Hollick-Kenyon (1897-1975) of Canadian Airways. This flight was especially remarkable for the landings that were made *en route* for position checks, presaging the future close support of field parties by aircraft. Meanwhile Frank Thomas Davies (1904-81) had served as physicist with the Americans on the First Byrd Antarctic Expedition, 1928-30, which wintered on the Ross Ice Shelf with dog teams and aircraft support. There was no more popular and stalwart member of the expedition than "Taffy," and his Antarctic experience resulted in his choice as leader of the Canadian IPY-II expedition to Chesterfield Inlet, 1932-33. He later became director-general of the Defence Research Telecommunications Establishment.

In World War II the U.K. saw a need to protect its rights in the Antarctic and, in 1943, launched the naval operation "Tabarin" for the purpose of establishing permanently manned stations in the British Antarctic Territory. Out of this operation grew the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS), now called the British Antarctic Survey. Andrew Taylor, of the Royal Canadian Engineers, sailed as second-in-command of the operation in December 1943. In the first season one station was established in the South Shetland Islands and a second on an island off the west coast of Graham Land; in the following season, when Taylor took command, a third station was established at Hope Bay, Trinity Peninsula, near the northern tip of Graham Land. Taylor's experience in northern Canada and Alaska was

put to good use in the initiation of wide-ranging surveys by dog sledge, which ultimately were to cover much of the Antarctic Peninsula and off-lying islands. Taylor now lives in retirement in Winnipeg.

In the seasons 1944-45 and 1945-46 the Newfoundland sealer *Eagle* was chartered for the establishment and re-supply of the stations; she had a Newfoundland crew with Robert C. Sheppard, of St. Johns, as master. A similar ship, *Trepassey*, with Newfoundland crew and Eugene Burden, of St. Johns, as master, was chartered for the 1946-47 season, when a new farthest-south station was established at Marguerite Bay at about latitude 68°S on the west coast of Graham Land. In succeeding years the FIDS, now with its own ice-strengthened ship, established more stations in the British Antarctic Territory, always in the face of difficulties in navigation through ice. In one season, 1949-50, it was necessary to call in air relief for the station at Marguerite Bay. Canadian assistance was sought and found in the shape of Peter Borden St. Louis, with a Norseman aircraft, and relief of the station was skilfully accomplished. St. Louis now lives in retirement in Ontario.

The post-World War II period saw the development of international cooperation in Antarctic research, starting on a large scale in the International Geophysical Year (IGY), 1957-58, and leading up to the Antarctic Treaty, signed initially by 12 countries in 1961. The Norwegian-British-Swedish Antarctic Expedition, 1949-52, had already been the forerunner in such cooperation. On this important expedition Ernest Frederick Roots, then of the Canadian Geological Survey, was chosen as chief geologist and conducted valuable surveys in Dronning Maud Land on extended journeys by dog sledge. Roots is now Science Adviser, Environment Canada, Hull, Quebec.

The years since the IGY have seen the full deployment of icebreakers, heavy and light aircraft and tractors in support of field research. Ian M. Whillans, now of Ohio State University, Columbus, exemplifies the Canadian scientist of a younger generation who has taken full advantage of opportunities offered under the U.S. Antarctic Research Program to make, in his case, distinguished contributions in the field of glaciology. But so far the only Canadian government foray to the Antarctic took place during the cruise of CGS *Hudson* from the Bedford Institute of Oceanography in 1969-70. On the southernmost leg of that cruise the ship's chief scientist, Cedric R. Mann, and his team successfully carried out oceanographic work in Drake Passage and off the South Shetland Islands, with visits to King George Island and Deception Island.

If Canada as a country ever decides to play an active and continuing role in Antarctic research under the Antarctic Treaty, it has unsurpassed logistic and scientific expertise for the work and may also look with pride on the past achievements of individual Canadians on that continent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to R.K. Headland, of the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, for the information on Canadian sealers and for providing the photograph of H. Blackwall Evans and to Prof. J.A. Jacobs, of the Department of Geodesy and Geophysics, Cambridge, for providing the photograph of Sir Charles Wright.