Roald Amundsen - Pole to Pole Norwegian Explorer

1872-1928

Nordic Spirit Symposium
February 2011

First to South Pole 100 yr anniversary
Amundsen’s Youth

* Born July 16, 1872 in Borge, Norway ~50 miles south of Oslo.

* 4th son in a family of relatively affluent shipowners and captains.

* Father died when he was 14.

* Mother wanted him to be doctor.

* Mother died when he was 21, freeing him to pursue life as explorer.

* Loved outdoors and skiing.

* Driven to be exceptionally physically fit. Trained in army.
Amundsen’s Inspirations

* As youth, he was inspired by Nansen’s crossing of Greenland and later Arctic *Fram* expedition.

* He was in crowd welcoming Fridtjof Nansen home. See photograph at right.

* Nansen a continual influence for all of Amundsen’s life:
  * Nansen provided advice, encouragement.
  * Nansen allowed him to use *Fram* for Arctic expedition. But he surreptitiously sailed *Fram* to Antarctica for polar expedition.

* Other inspirations:

Sir John Franklin: doomed NW Passage expedition. “Secretly … I irretrievably decided to be an Arctic explorer.” from Amundsen’s autobiography.

Frederick Cook, controversial polar explorer.
Belgian Antarctic Expedition (1897-1899)

* Amundsen went to sea at age of 15 reaching rank of mate (much like Nansen).

* Read all books on polar exploration –immersed in preparations for life as polar explorer and obtained skipper’s license.

* Joined Adrien de Gerlaches’ 1899 Belgica Expedition to Antarctica as First Mate at age of 25.

* Belgica goal to locate South Magnetic Pole’s position during a summer cruise.

* First ship’s crew to go on land (Palmerland on Peninsula) and overwinter in Antarctica.

* De Gerlache and ship’s capt. died of scurvy.

* Trapped in Bellingshausen Sea ice for over 1 yr., Frederick Cook and Amundsen led crew to safety.
The Quest to Navigate the North-West Passage

* N-W Passage: Arctic sea route linking North Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

* Desire to find trade route from Europe to Asia. Pack ice problem.

* Quest led to exploration of northern coasts of North America.

* John Cabot (1497), James Cook (1776), John Ross (1818), and others 1820’s.

* Sir John Franklin’s (1845) disasterous expedition – 11 yrs of searches w/ Inuits.
Amundsen’s North-West Passage Expedition (1903-1906)

* Successful expedition used 70 ft., shallow draft herring fishing ship, *Gjoa*. *Gjoa is now with Fram in Oslo Museum.*

* *Gjoa* crew of 7 determined position of the Magnetic North Pole.

* During viscious storm, crew acted unafraid to calm sled dogs. Iced in for 2yrs.

* Amundsen lived off land and admired the Netsilik Inuit as Arctic mentors.

* Expedition was source of national pride as Norway had gained independence from Sweden during the cruise. Amundsen and crew were national heroes.
Antarctica: The Last Place on Earth
Some Facts about Antarctica

* 5th largest continent: 5.4 million sq. mi. (10% of world’s land area).

* Larger than lower 48 U.S. + Mexico.

* Elevation of up to 16,066 ft.

* Antarctica is 98% ice covered.

* Antarctica has 90% of Earth’s ice.

* Ice up to 10,000 ft. thick (climate).

* 70% of Earth’s fresh water.

* Small no. of land plants.

* Seabirds, penguins, krill, whales.

* No native pop.; 7 nations claim territories; 46 nations signed 1959 agreement.
Weather of Antarctica

* Antarctica is important to oceans, weather, climate, ecology

* Lowest recorded temp. of -129 °F at Vostok Station/wind chills to -148 °F.

* Mean annual temp. in interior is -70 °F.

* Winds of up to 200 knots at coasts.

* Relatively moderate winds at South Pole.

* Weather varies with location/elevation.

* Snow rarely melts/very thick ice packs.

* Many glaciers with crevasses.

* Large seasonal temperature and sea ice variability (right). Timing important.
Key Antarctic Expeditions
Cook (1772-1775)
Bellingshausen (1819-1821)
Ross (1841)
Scott (1901-1904)
Shackleton (1908)
(UK Claim in Ant.)
Amundsen (1911-12)
Scott (1911-1912)
A ‘Minor Diversion’ South

* Amundsen’s intention to go to North Pole.

* Asked Nansen’s blessing to use *Fram*. *Refit with a diesel engine.*

* Difficulty in raising funds for expedition/ little support from Norwegian gov’t.

* Reports came in Sept. 1909 that Frederick Cook and Robert Peary had reached North Pole.

* Amundsen kept secret his intent to sail for South Pole from Nansen, Norwegian gov’t. (only his brother, Leon, knew; crew was polled in Madeira off Morocco. 4 mo. sail to Bay of Whales.

* On way south (8 wks after Scott), he sent telegram to Scott: ‘BEG TO INFORM YOU FRAM PROCEEDING ANTARCTICA – AMUNDSEN’

* Thus, perhaps the greatest race of all time was on although Scott denied it was a race.
Roald Amundsen

Robert Falcon Scott
With wife, Kathleen below on Terra Nova

~1860 mi round trip in 99 days

~1920 mi

Note: $1^\circ$ lat = 1 nt.mi = 1.15 mi

Kathleen Scott sculptor, socialite, studied w/Rodin knew Picasso. 'Scott’s son - Peter Markham.
Amundsen and Scott’s Base Huts

Amundsen’s Framheim hut on Bay of Whales on Ross Ice shelf housing 10 men; 97 dogs.

Scott’s Cape Evans hut on Ross Island housing 25 men; 19 ponies; 35 dogs; 3 motor sledges. Hut still stands.

Photo by Eric Christian
Maps of the Greatest Race Depots (l.) and Timeline (r.)
Amundsen in Race to South Pole

* After false start, Bjaaland, Hanssen, Hassel, and Wisting led by Amundsen left for Pole Oct. 19, 1911. Distance to Pole was ~900 mi.

* 52 of original 97 Greenland Siberian husky dogs pulling 4 sledges were key to expedition. Five final members were great skiers and dog sled drivers.

* Set up well supplied depots every degree lat.
Amundsen in Race to South Pole

* Set up clever perpendicular marker system to find way back.

* Did not use Shackleton’s previous route as did Scott. Thus, exploration through crevasses of Axel Heiberg Glacier.

* Weather conditions actually similar to those experienced by Scott team.

* Amundsen had concern that Scott might beat him with his motor sledges. But Scott left engineer William Skelton behind.
Amundsen First to South Pole

* Arrived at South Pole Dec. 14, 1911 with team of 6 men and 16 dogs. Carefully surveyed area to claim priority (i.e., NP controversy). Navigation hard at Pole. Encircled Pole with radius of 12.5 mi.

* Named camp *Poleheim*.

* Covered ~700 miles in 56 days having carried a ton of supplies to 10,000 ft. Made it back to Framheim in 35 days.

* Scott arrived 36 days later finding Norwegian flag & note to Scott asking him to forward a letter to King Haakon VII about Amundsen’s successful race & naming of a plateau in Kings’ honor.
Amundsen Returning from South Pole

* Amundsen team arrived back at *Framheim* Jan. 25, 1912 with 11 dogs.

* Announced success from Hobart, Australia March 7, 1912 after 1 month voyage on *Fram*. Vital to beat Scott to telegraph station to avoid being upstaged.

* Amundsen had no idea Scott and polar team had died on way back.
Scott in Race to South Pole

* Departed Nov. 1, 1911, ~10 days after Amundsen (ponies); 900 mi. to Pole. 60 mi more than Amundsen-camp choice.

* Scott arrived at South Pole 35 days after Amundsen with extra man.

* Found Norwegian flag & note to Scott asking him to forward letter to King Haakon.

Scott: “The worst has happened …All the daydreams must go… Great God! This is an awful place.”

* Scott team lacked food/had scurvy

* Team exhausted from manhauling

* Team died 11 miles from One Ton Depot and ~ 140 miles from Cape Evans; plan for depot to be 20 mi closer (pony prob.)
Differences between Amundsen and Scott:

Leadership and Planning

From *The South Pole* by Amundsen: “Victory awaits him who has everything in order – luck people call it. Defeat is certain for him who has neglected to take necessary precautions in time – this is called bad luck.”

Amundsen on Scott’s death: “I would gladly forgo any honor or money if thereby I could have saved Scott his terrible death.”
**Amundsen**
Adventurer/democratic leader/
respected by team

Motivated by desire to be successful explorer

Positive attitude/no excuses

Loved nature’s challenges

Meticulous planner (gas cans, proper clothes, food (pemmican, choc., milk powder, bisc.,…), goggles, necessities.

Sought advice from Nansen

Emphasized dog sledges and skiing/small team (up to 20 mi/d)

Good navigators

Viewed expedition as a ski race to Pole/ took only 2 pictures!

Average writer. Not pretentious.

**Scott**
Navy officer/dogmatic leader/
questioned as leader

Motivated by desire to be promoted as naval officer

Negative attitude/’poor me’/excuses

Felt slighted by Nature’s challenges

Poor planner (leaky gas cans, ill-suited clothes, inadequate diet (scurvy), brought creature comforts, piano; 5 not 4 to pole.

Did not take advice from Nansen

Motor sledges, ponies (19, 9 lost before journey), dogs, manhauling/large team

Inadequate navigators

De-emphasized race aspect (?)/ emphasized science

Excellent writer. Promoted heroism.
Huntford’s Comments on Scott

“Scott was a heroic bungler. … (He) instantly became a legend.”
Huntford

“He (Scott) personified the glorious failure which by now had become a British ideal. He was a suitable hero for a nation in decline.” Huntford

Huntford concerning the reporting of Scott’s expedition:
1. Diary entries were edited and stories contrived to glorify Scott and Oates.
2. Unflattering and critical comments by Scott team were removed (~70 entries deleted)
3. Race aspect was minimized.
Huntford on Amundsen

“Amundsen had made the conquest of the Pole into something between art and sport. “

“It was Scott who had set out to be a heroic example. Amundsen merely wanted to be first at the Pole. Both had their prayers answered.”
**Maud Expedition (1918-1924)**

* Amundsen compelled to complete expedition in Arctic by Nansen.


* Plan to freeze *Maud* in ice and drift toward North Pole like *Fram* had done.

* Sailed west to east through the Northeast Passage (aka Northern Route) 1918-1920. Followed only Nordenskiold (1878). Important shipping route recently opened (ice melt).

* Amundsen mauled by a bear. Scientific results (Harald Sverdrup) were valuable.

* Became first person to circumnavigate globe in Arctic waters. July 1920.
Amundsen Used Airplanes in Attempt to Reach North Pole

* Amundsen and Oskar Omdal attempted to fly from Wainwright, AK to Spitzbergen over North Pole in 1923.

* Amundsen-Ellsworth team flew two Dornier Do J flying boats (N-24 and N-25) to 87° 44’ N.

* One plane damaged on landing.

* Created airstrip by shoveling 600 tons of ice while eating 1 lb of rations daily.

* Able to return after thought to be lost forever.
Norge Airship Expedition to the North Pole


* 2 day flight from Spitzbergen to Alaska (May 11-13, 1926).

* Perhaps 1st team to North Pole.

* Began feud with Italian engineer/pilot Umberto Nobile. Mussolini involved.

Spitzbergen stamp honoring Nansen, Amundsen, and Sverdrup
Amundsen’s Heroic Death

* Amundsen flew on an Arctic rescue mission, to find Nobile and crew who crashed flying dirigible Italia. Search included 5 nations, 23 planes, 20 ships, dog sled teams. Movie *Red Tent* a fictionalized depiction starring Sean Connery.

* Amundsen was killed as plane crashed into Arctic Ocean around June 18, 1928.

* Ironically, Nobile and Amundsen were bitter enemies.

* That same year, speaking to a journalist about his love of the icy Arctic, Amundsen said, "If only you knew how splendid it is up there, that’s where I want to die."

* Wreckage of Amundsen’s plane never found despite searches using Norwegian Navy autonomous underwater vehicle Hugin 1000 in 2004 and 2009.
Amundsen’s Honors
Amundsen Sea off Antarctica
Amundsen Bay in Antarctica
Mount Amundsen in Antarctica
Amundsen Glacier in Antarctica
Amundsen Gulf in Arctic Ocean
Northwest Passage Historic Park
Moon crater on Moon’s South Pole

Amundsen’s home

CCGS Amundsen
Icebreaker

Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station

Fram and Gjoa
Museum
Oslo

Tromso, Nor.
100th Anniversary NW Passage Cruise by CCGS Amundsen

CCGS Amundsen
formerly Sir John Franklin
Further Reading

- Scott and Amundsen: Their Race to the South Pole
- My Life as an Explorer
- The North West Passage
- The South Pole
- Sydpolen
Books:
Scott and Amundsen, Roland Huntford. My Life as an Explorer, Roald Amundsen
North West Passage, Roald Amundsen
The South Pole, Roald Amundsen
Explorers, Royal Geographical Society, Smithsonian Institution, DK Publishing.

YouTube Videos:
Roald Amundsen
Amundsen and Nobile on North Pole 1926/1928 (Music by Pink Floyd)
Launch of KNM Roald Amundsen
Heroes de la Antartida – Mecano-Robert Falcon Scott – Polo Sur (in Spanish)
The Last Voyage of Robert Falcon Scott (BBC)

Videos:
The Last Place on Earth: 7 videos based on Huntford book Scott and Amundsen (1985)
Scott of the Antarctic starring John Mills 1948, Synergy Archive Series, 1h 51min. This is a melodramatic depiction of Scott as a hero.
The Red Tent, 1969, Fictional psychodrama movie about Umberto Nobile starring Sean Connery, Claudia Cardinale, and Peter Finch

Several Useful Websites
Video of Amundsen’s Accomplishments
Extra Slides
No one lives in Antarctica permanently

7 Nations have claims recognized by each other but not by others

1959 Antarctica Treaty signed by 46 countries:
1. Peaceful purposes
2. Scientific freedom
3. International scientific cooperation
4. Territorial sovereignty
5. No nuclear activities
6. Geographic – 60S-90S
7. Inspections
8. Jurisdiction
9. Treaty meetings
10. UN involvement/disputes
Manhattan Northwest Passage Completion (1969)
Amundsen Northwest Passage Expedition on Gjoa
For Perspective: What Items, Information and Technologies Were Not Yet Available to Polar Explorers (1850 – 1920’s)?
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2008
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North Pole Web Cam

2008
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www.baffinbabes.com/
What was happening during Amundsen’s lifetime (1872-1928)?

1870’s
British Empire continues but about to decline
Henrik Ibsen (Norwegian releases *A Doll’s House*)
Telephone and light bulb invented
DeLong’s Jeannette expedition lost in Arctic 1879
Charles Hall Arctic expedition – Hall poisoned in 1871
What was happening during Amundsen’s lifetime (1872-1928)?

1900’s
Radio invented
Nordic Winter games in Sweden, 1901
Scott-Shackleton Antarctic trek 1901-1904
Amundsen traverses NW  1903
Norwegian Independence from Sweden (1905)
Frederick Cook claims North Pole in 1908
Kodak Brownie camera invented – Nansen photos
Shackleton reaches 88 23 S (97 mi from NP) Jan. 1909
Peary came within 5 nt mi of North Pole April 6, 1909
   (TV movie *Honor and Glory*)
1910’s
European militarism – WW I (1914-1918)
Wegener’s Continental Drift Theory
Amundsen reached South Pole Dec. 14, 1911
Robert Falcon Scott reaches S. Pole Jan. 17, 1912
Johansen commits suicide in 1913 (prob. w/Amundsen)
Movies:
[Scott of the Antarctic – made in 1948
The Last Place on Earth -1985 Scott/Amundsen]
Shackleton’s Trans-Antarctic expedition ends 1914-1917 in disaster in 1917, but all hands safe. [Movie: The Endurance, Shackleton’s Antarctic Adventure]
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1920’s
Roaring 20’s in U.S./Prohibition
‘Christiania’ name changed to ‘Oslo’ in 1925
Lindbergh flies across Atlantic
Shackleton dies on last Antarctic expedition 1921
Nansen wins Nobel Peace Prize in 1922
1st designated Winter Games in Chamonix, 1924
Richard Byrd and Floyd Bennett claims to reach N. Pole (disputed) in 1926
Amundsen died during plane search for Umberto Nobile (Italia dirigible) near North Pole in 1928; 5 nations, 23 planes, 20 ships, sled teams
see movie *The Red Tent*
Richard Byrd expedition to Antarctica 1928
Roald Engelbregt Gravning Amundsen

* Amundsen’s Youth and Influences (b. 1872)
* Belgian Antarctic Expedition (1897-1899)
* 1st Northwest Passage Traverse (1903)
* Race to the South Pole (1910-1912)
* Maud Arctic Expedition (1918-1925)
* Arctic Airplane Expeditions (1923-1925)
* Norge Air Expedition to North Pole (1926)
* Heroic Death (1928)
* Legacy