

Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Director, Institute of Marine Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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Shackleton's Second Antarctic Expedition

Ernest Shackleton's first Antarctic expedition didn't go well, and he privately vowed to return to the Antarctic and outdo Robert Scott. Following his return to England and a period of convalescence, he found himself in public demand as the first major figure to return from Antarctica because the ship *Discovery* was still lodged in the ice.

He was offered a series of temporary positions advising and assisting other polar expeditions, and also worked briefly as a journalist. Because of his visibility and personal qualities, he was soon offered a job with a wealthy industrialist, which involved interviewing and entertaining his business associates.

Shackleton's highest priority, however, was mounting another expedition to Antarctica, with the goal of getting to both the geographical South Pole as well as the South Magnetic Pole, which don't happen to be in the same location. His employer, William Beardmore, was impressed enough to offer some financial support. Obtaining funding for an expedition was challenging, but through his friends and connections he was able to obtain the last of the necessary funds just two weeks before the expedition ship, *Nimrod*, was ready to depart.

While *Nimrod* may seem like an odd name for a ship, it was originally a biblical word meaning mighty hunter, appropriate for a ship. In modern times, however, it has been used to describe someone who is not particularly bright, synonymous with words like moron, doofus, lamebrain or numbskull.

On New Year's Day 1908, the *Nimrod* set sail from New Zealand for Antarctica. Shackleton had promised Scott that he would not use the original *Discovery* base in McMurdo Sound, but this proved to be an unfortunate commitment. His two other choices ended up being areas of unstable ice conditions, such that he wasn't able to establish a safe camp in either location. So in view of the lack of alternatives, he had to use common sense and head for McMurdo Sound, which they reached in late January.

A base was established and although conditions weren't ideal due to the weather delays, Shackleton's leadership and communication skills kept the men focused and optimistic about their objectives.

As it was later to be known, "The Great Southern Journey", while not getting to the South Geographic Pole, did reach the farthest point south ever traveled to by humans (88° 23' S), just 120 miles from the pole. Shackleton and his team of three others also discovered the approximate location of the South Magnetic Pole, were the first to ascend Mt. Erebus, the southernmost active volcano on Earth, and were also the first people to see and travel over the South Polar Plateau. They did get a taste of near defeat on their return to the base as food nearly ran out and they had to survive on half-rations.

On his return to England in 1909, Shackleton was widely honored for his achievements, a somewhat different homecoming than that following his initial polar misadventure with Scott. His greatest honor was no doubt being knighted by King Edward VII; so he became Sir Ernest Shackleton at the age of 46. He also soon published, *Heart of the Antarctic*, which became popular and enhanced his growing reputation even further.

Over the next four years, Shackleton split his time between a large number of public lectures, social engagements, and involvement in a number of diverse business enterprises, hoping to profit from his new hero status. None of these were particularly profitable however, and it was his public presentations that provided his main source of income.

He settled in at home with his family, and at one point in 1910, declared that his place was at home and there would be no more Antarctic exploration. Time would prove him wrong, however, and the greatest adventure and tale of maritime survival was yet to come.