

# Tom Crean

## Antarctic Explorer



# Born to Explore

Tom Crean was born on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1877 in Annascaul, Co. Kerry. Annascaul is located on the Dingle Peninsula in the southwest corner of Ireland. Tom grew up on the family farm and was one of eleven children.

When he was just 16, he signed up to join the Royal Navy at a naval station at nearby Minard Beach. His adventure was about to begin!



# Life in the Royal Navy

Tom Crean began his naval career as an apprentice aboard the training ship *Impregnable* at Devonport. From 1894 to 1900, he served aboard *HMS Devastation*, *HMS Royal Arthur*, *HMS Wild Swan*, *HMS Defiance* and *HMS Vivid* obtaining the ranks of ordinary seaman, able seaman and petty officer, second class.

In February 1900, Crean was posted to the *Ringarooma*, which was part of the Royal Navy's New Zealand Squadron. In December 1901, the *Ringarooma* was ordered to assist Robert Falcon Scott's ship *Discovery* when it was docked at Lyttelton Harbour awaiting departure to Antarctica. When an able seaman of Scott's ship deserted after striking a petty officer, a replacement was required. Crean volunteered, and was accepted.



Tom Crean 1894



# Tom Crean's 1<sup>st</sup> Antarctic Expedition 1901

Captain Robert Falcon Scott was in charge of the Discovery Expedition to the South Pole in 1901. Antarctica was relatively unexplored at this point and with no native inhabitants or long range radio communications, the explorers would be cut-off from the outside world for almost two years.

The goal of Scott's expedition was to explore any lands that could be reached and to conduct scientific experiments. Scott didn't reach the South Pole on this expedition but did achieve a new record of being furthest south. Crean was part of the support crew on this expedition and was promoted to Petty Officer, First Class for his efforts.



Captain Robert Falcon Scott





# Tom Crean's 2<sup>nd</sup> Antarctic Expedition

By 1909, the race to be the first to the South Pole was heating up. Captain Scott led a second expedition to Antarctica called *Terra Nova* but this time they had competition from a Norwegian expedition called *Fram* led by Roald Amundsen.

Captain Scott requested that Tom Crean join him on this expedition because of his strength, reliability and experience. Crean gladly accepted. On 29<sup>th</sup> November 1910, Terra Nova left Port Chalmers in New Zealand for the South Pole.



Terra Nova

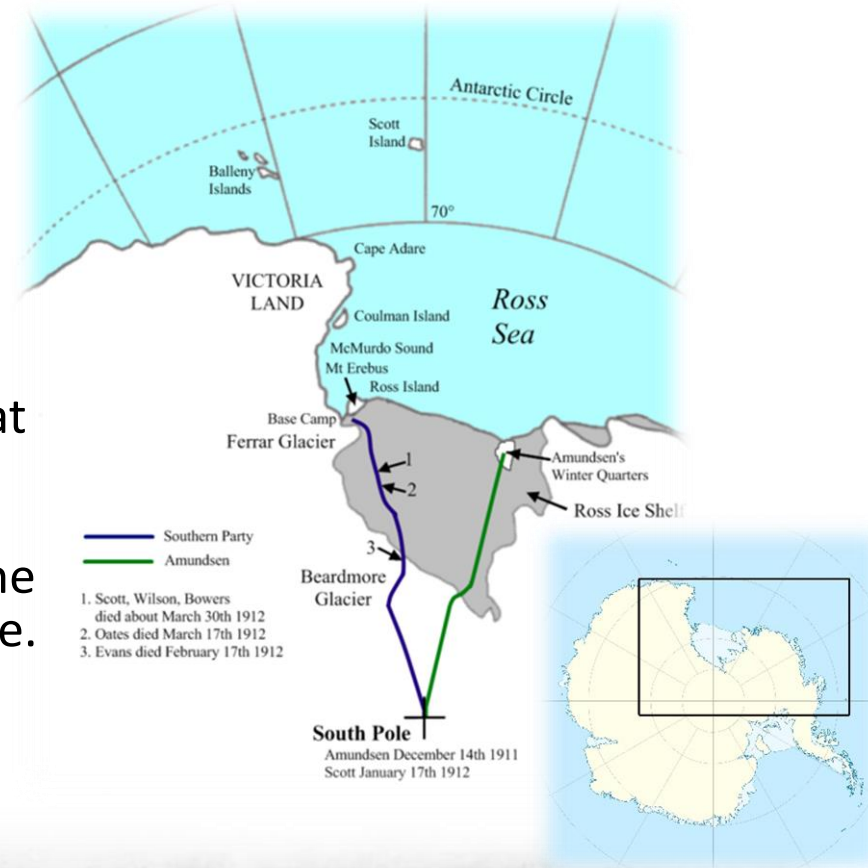


# Reaching the South Pole

To make it easier for Captain Scott's party to reach the South Pole, the expedition left depots of supplies along the route so that the expedition party could save energy by not carrying all their food.

Tom Crean spent most of 1911 laying depots of supplies so that an attempt could be made to reach the South Pole. He proved to be extremely strong and capable when it came to going out on the ice, so much so that Captain Scott chose him to be in the final group of eight to march approx. 1000km to the South Pole.

However, about 250km from the South Pole, Captain Scott ordered Crean and two other men to return to base camp.



# Reaching the South Pole

On 17<sup>th</sup> January 1912, Scott and his party reached the South Pole however, they weren't the first to get there. They found Amundsen's tent, a Norwegian flag and some supplies. They were bitterly disappointed.

On the return journey to base camp, all five men died in the bitter cold. On 29<sup>th</sup> March 1912, Scott's final diary entry read, "For God's sake look after our people."



Captain Scott & his party at the South Pole





# Reaching Base Camp

Tom Crean, William Lashly and Lieutenant Evans were ordered to return to base camp by Captain Scott. Having walked 1000km with Captain Scott, the three men now had to walk 1,200km back to base.

On the return journey, Lt. Evans became ill with scurvy and had to be hauled in a sledge by Crean and Lashly. With 56km remaining to base camp and Evans close to death, Crean walked the distance on his own without food or a compass so he could get help for Lt. Evans. Evans was rescued and made a full recovery.



Crean and Lt. Evans





# The Endurance Expedition

The third and final trip made by Crean to Antarctica was on the Endurance expedition in 1914, led by Kildare man, Ernest Shackleton.

Shackleton's ambitious aim was to make the first ever coast-to-coast crossing of the Antarctic continent. There were thousands applicants for the expedition. Only 27 men were selected and Crean was chosen as Second Officer.

Crean was also to be one of the six who would attempt to make the crossing of the continent.



Ernest Shackleton



# Trapped in the ice!

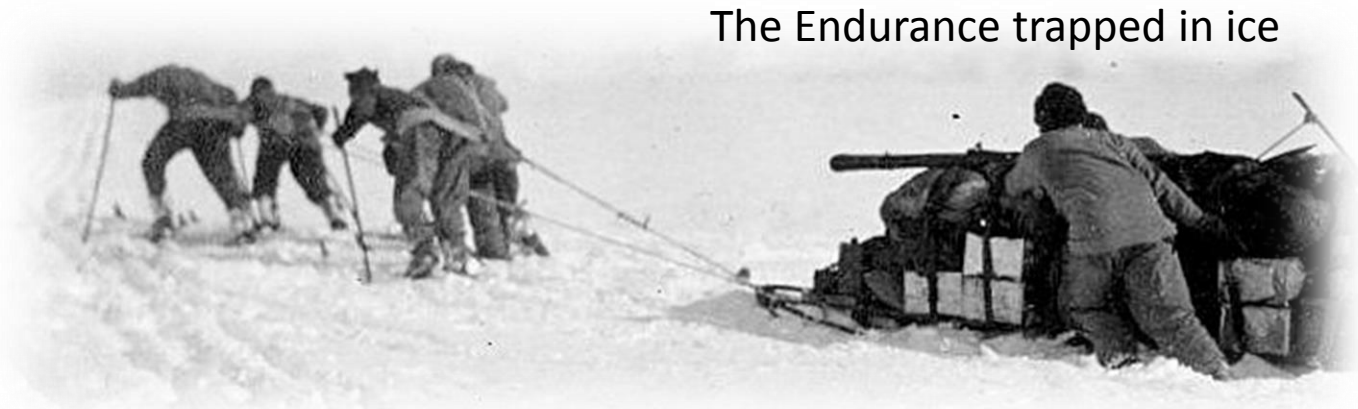
The Endurance sailed to the Weddell Sea in Antarctica and became trapped in ice in January 1915. Despite efforts to free the ship, it was abandoned in October 1915. Shackleton decided to set up camp on the ice because they could not launch the lifeboats due to the sea ice. Eventually the pressure of the ice crushed the Endurance.

They remained on the ice for six months until they decided to sail 160km north to the uninhabited Elephant Island in three lifeboats. After six days in freezing temperatures and rough seas, they reached Elephant Island.

Elephant Island was very remote and the crew had very little chance of rescue.



The Endurance trapped in ice



# Rescue!

Shackleton picked Tom Crean and four of his fittest and strongest men to make a 1300km journey across open seas in the lifeboat *James Caird* to a whaling station on South Georgia island. This was their only hope of being rescued as they had no way of communicating with the outside world.

Worsley, the navigator, took a compass and a sextant with him on the journey. He used these instruments to stay on course and find South Georgia.

The rest of the crew of the *Endurance* remained behind and waited to be rescued. They made a makeshift shelter by upturning the two remaining lifeboats.



Launching the James Caird





# South Georgia

After 17 days and 1300km in freezing temperatures and rough seas, Shackleton, Crean and the four other crew members arrived at South Georgia. However, they quickly realised that they were on the wrong side of the island.

They decided against sailing around to the other side because the seas were too rough and the *James Caird* was too battered from the long journey.

Shackleton, Tom Crean and Worsley had to cross the island which meant going into uncharted territory and climbing a glacier over 1000m high.



Elephant Island to South Georgia





# Mr Shackleton, I presume...

It took Crean, Shackleton and Worsley 36 hours to climb 1000 meters over a glacier to reach the whaling station on the other side of South Georgia. When they descended down from the slopes of the glacier, the Norwegian whalers were surprised at the sight of three ghostly figures coming towards them.

They were so dishevelled looking that the station manager, who knew Shackleton, did not recognise him.

When Shackleton told the whalers about their ordeal, they immediately set sail to rescue the three remaining crew members on the other side of the island.



Crean, Shackleton and Worsley after their crossing of South Georgia



# Back to Elephant Island

Shackleton's attention now turned to rescuing the remaining 22 Endurance crew that were on Elephant Island. Shackleton took responsibility for a ship, *The Southern Sky*, that was moored in South Georgia. They set sail for Elephant Island in May 1916 and came within 110km before the sea ice became too thick.

Shackleton and Crean returned to the island on an icebreaker in August 1916 and rescued the remaining crew members. All crew members were accounted for.

Tom Crean showed strength, resilience and bravery that ultimately led to all of the Discovery crew being rescued.



All safe, all well



## Life after the Antarctic

Tom Crean settled back into life in the Royal Navy after his Antarctic adventures. He was stationed at Chatham, Cobh and finally at Berehaven where he earned the rank of Warrant Officer. He retired from the Royal Navy in 1920.

Shackleton would go on to lead another Antarctic expedition and when he asked Tom Crean to accompany him, he politely refused saying that he didn't have another expedition in him.

Tom Crean married Eileen Herlihy in 1917. Between 1918 and 1922, they had three children Mary, Kathleen and Eileen.



Warrant Officer Tom Crean





# Retirement

When Tom Crean retired from the Royal Navy, he returned to his native Annascaul. He opened a pub called The South Pole Inn. Locally Tom became known as 'Tom the Pole' because of his adventures in the Antarctic.

Tom Crean was a very quiet and modest man and never mentioned his heroics on the various Antarctic expeditions. Tom Crean had a glacier, 'Crean Glacier' named after him in South Georgia as well as 'Mount Crean' in Antarctica.

Tom Crean died in the Bons Secours hospital in Cork in 1938. Today he is recognised as one of the great figures of the heroic age of Antarctic exploration.



The South Pole Inn, Annascaul, Co. Kerry





# Interesting Sites on Tom Crean

- <http://tomcreandiscovery.com/>
- <http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/tom-crean-1877-1938-an-irish-hero/>
- <http://www.annascaul.ie/tom-crean/>
- <http://kerrymuseum.ie/galleries/tom-crean-room/>
- <http://www.dublincity.ie/story/tom-crean?language=en>

