

Scott of the Antarctic

Ask British people to name a great explorer, and most would probably first think of Scott. This is a strange, given that he actually came *second* in his greatest expedition, the Antarctic journey to the South Pole.

Exactly a hundred years ago Robert Scott, a British explorer, set off by ship in the hope of being the first to reach the South Pole. The journey took years to plan and finance and it was of great national and international interest at the time. In fact, reports suggest that over 8000 men from around the world applied to be part of the expedition.

The British team arrived at the Pole in January 1912 after travelling 1500 km in terrible conditions. On arrival they discovered they were a month too late; they had been beaten by the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen and his party who had found a shorter route.

Whilst Amundsen's team were euphoric when they reached the South Pole, Scott and his men were desperately disappointed. Scott wrote: 'This is an awful place ... Now for the run home and a desperate struggle. I wonder if we can do it.' With heavy hearts, they began the long and difficult journey back, with temperatures falling to -55°C . However, the last team members died in March 1912 in a terrible blizzard. The bodies of Scott and two others were found in their tent eight months later, together with a heavy sledge (16 kg) of geological and scientific specimens. Even at the end, the team had continued to pull this.

Scott's journey is well-known, despite his failure to win the race. Some say that he needed a more experienced team and that he was not sufficiently well-prepared. However, for many he is a man of courage, who was brave until death.

Their dramatic and tragic journey is all the more interesting because the explorers described all stages of the journey in detail. Scott's writing is optimistic and selfless; at the end he is full of love and respect for his team, his family, his country and God. In his last letter to his wife, he writes: 'What lots and lots I could tell you of this journey. How much better it has been than lounging in comfort at home'. He asks his wife to marry again and to encourage their son to become interested in science and nature. 'It is better than games,' he writes simply.

- 1 Work in pairs to brainstorm useful items to take on a polar expedition.
- 2 Now read the text and find out about what happened to Scott, a famous explorer, and his expedition.
- 3 Read the text again and complete the sentences with the correct information by reading the text.
 - 1 Scott and his team started their journey _____ ago.
 - 2 He and his party wanted to be the first ones to reach the _____ Pole.
 - 3 When they reached the Pole, they realised that they had been beaten by the team from _____.
 - 4 Amundsen and his team had arrived there _____ earlier.
 - 5 Scott felt _____ when he saw they had not been the first to reach the Pole.
 - 6 The weather was terrible and on the journey back it dropped to _____ Celsius.
 - 7 Scott died in March 1912, in their _____.
 - 8 The bodies of Scott and two of his team were found as well as a big, heavy _____.
 - 9 Most people think Scott was a courageous and _____ man.
 - 10 His last letters to his _____ show what sort of man he was.
 - 11 He wanted his son to learn about _____ and _____ because it was more worthwhile than games.

- 4** Answer the following questions, then discuss them with your partner.
- 1 Why were the people who found Scott and his team surprised to find the sledge?
 - 2 Does everyone who knows this story think positively of Scott?
 - 3 Look at the quotation from Scott's letter: 'What lots and lots I could tell you of this journey. How much better it has been than lounging in comfort at home'. What does this mean, and what does it say about Scott's character?
 - 4 Do you think the ending for Scott might have been different if they had reached the South Pole first?

5 Finish the adjective with the appropriate *-ing* or *-ed* ending.

- 1 When Scott and his team first started their expedition they were very _____ (excite).
- 2 The journey across the Antarctic was very _____ (tire).
- 3 When Scott's men arrived after their long and difficult trek, they were very _____ (disappoint) to find the Norwegian flag flying.
- 4 The last weeks of the journey home were no doubt very _____ (frighten) for the men.
- 5 Scott asked his wife to encourage their son to become _____ (interest) in science and nature.
- 6 This story is an _____ (interest) one partly because the journey was recorded in writing.

6 Discuss how these things have changed for explorers from 100 years ago:

clothes	food	transport	gadgets	other equipment
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Glossary

blizzard (*noun*) - a storm with a lot of snow and strong winds

courage (*noun*) - the ability to do things that are dangerous, frightening or very difficult

dramatic (*adj*) - exciting and easy to remember: *the ending of the story was very dramatic*

euphoric (*adj*) - very happy. This feeling may only last a short time.

sledge (*noun*) - a vehicle that you sit on to slide over snow. It moves on smooth pieces of wood or plastic.

specimen (*noun*) - an example of something, especially a plant or an animal

struggle (*noun*) - an attempt to do something that takes a lot of effort over a period of

time her struggle with the illness lasted for 3 months

tent (*noun*) - a structure made of cloth that you sleep in when camping. It's supported by poles and ropes.