

The Diary of
A. Forbes Mackay
1908-1909





Dr. Allister Forbes Mackay on board the *Nimrod* a few days after the return from the South Magnetic Pole.

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Manuscripts in the Royal Scottish Museum Edinburgh, part 2.

William S Bruce papers and diary of A Forbes Mackay.

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INTRODUCTION

by
Joy Pitman

ALISTER FORBES MACKAY was born on February 22, 1878, in Carskey, Southend, Argyllshire, son of Colonel Alexander Forbes Mackay and Margaret Isabella (Innes) Mackay. While his parents were in India, he was brought up in Campbeltown. The family later moved to Edinburgh, where he attended George Watson's College. Mackay did biological work under Professor Geddes and D'Arcy Thomson at Dundee. He served as a trooper in South Africa and later with Baden Powell's police. After returning to graduate from Edinburgh in 1901 as M.B., CH.B., he went back to the front as a civil surgeon. Later he entered the Navy as a surgeon, but retired after four years to join Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition.

Mackay was the junior member of the three-man party which reached the South Magnetic Pole on January 16, 1909. Professor T. W. Edgeworth David, a geologist, was the leader, and second-in-command was Douglas Mawson.

The men made the journey on foot, hauling their tent and provisions by sledge over what was often very difficult terrain. By the end of the trip the three men were in a greatly weakened state, having spent 122 days in travelling 1,260 miles, much of it covered twice in relaying.

Professor David's account has been published in Shackleton's "Heart of the Antarctic"¹, and his original diary is in the archives of the University of Sydney. Mawson's diary is held by the Mawson Institute for Antarctic Research, at the University of Adelaide.² Further manuscript material relating to the expedition is held by the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge.

The party originally left the depot at Cape Royds on October 5, 1908. Mackay's journal, a transcription of which follows here, begins on November 31, on the group's first day on the Drygalski glacier. It is very much a personal account, although it includes some details of mileage, altitude and temperatures. He talks of the hunger, weariness and discomfort they suffered, and of anxiety about their slim chances of returning safely from the Pole in time to meet the "Nimrod". Mackay reveals on occasion how the difficult circumstances sorely tried their tempers. His account of the transferral of leadership from the Professor to Mawson differs significantly from that of David, in that Mackay states that he initiated the move by insisting that the Professor was no longer fit to lead.

In 1911 Mackay was planning to make an Antarctic coastal survey, on an expedition with six men and twenty-four dogs, living off seal and penguin meat. He mentions that this expedition could be "put into execution in connection with, or as part of such an expedition as Dr. Bruce proposes".³ The "young and ardent explorer" was supported in his proposals by Clements R. Markham.⁴ However, he cannot have been successful in raising funds, as Bruce later put him in touch with Stefansson, and in 1913 Mackay

joined the ill-fated Canadian Arctic Expedition. The “Karluk”, a whaling vessel not suited to ice-work, was lost in a gale while Stefansson was on shore. The ship drifted for nearly four months in the ice and was finally crushed and sank. The crew survived the winter in a hut on the ice.⁵ A small party left the main group to make for land in January 1914, and Mackay led another in February. A later group, returning from an unsuccessful attempt to reach Herald Island, met with Mackay’s party in a poor state of health. He refused all offers of assistance, however, and was never heard of again. The rest of the main party eventually reached Wrangel Island in March, from where Captain Bartlett set out for help. Those who survived were finally rescued by a Canadian relief vessel in September 1914.

Mackay’s death is therefore assumed to have occurred in 1914. 🍀

THE DIARY

Nov. 31st

First day on Drygalski barrier. Curious formation, very similar to Culbin Sand Hills. Rounded ridges of ice about 100 feet high, running about N & S crossed by ridges of snow almost at right angles. Plateau wind has been blowing all day, but it has now dropped, and thermo. is at +28. Very hot inside tent. Our working day now is of course from midnight to noon.

DEC. 1ST

Hauled sledges on about one mile towards middle of barrier. Found country growing rougher, so halted, lunched, and then Mawson took dip. observations, while prof. and I went ahead reconnoitring. Country continued to grow worse. We decided it was impassable and resolved to return to southern shore of barrier, travel outwards till barrier appeared smoother, and then cross. No plateau wind today, very warm.

DEC. 2ND

Retraced our steps to edge of barrier, and then turned Eastwards, made a good march on excellent surface. I spent a sleepless night thinking the others were inclined to give up, but this morning they both declared themselves keen. Of course we are all stale, but otherwise fit.

DEC. 3RD

Marching along south side of barrier, snow fairly good, but deep and rather soft, making walking very tiring. Did 3¼ miles. Prof. and Mawson reconnoitred barrier after dinner and think it practicable. It certainly looks smoother than at the last place we tried.

(DEC.) 4TH

Hauled sledges half a-mile on to barrier, made an early lunch, and then started, all three to reconnoitre to the Northward. Penetrated about 5 miles in to barrier, but could not be certain that we saw N. side.

Made out a route just possible for sledges, but the crossing will probably take us about a week.

Got back to camp at noon for lunch, all very tired. The Prof. now asked me if I would go back to the last place we had seen seals and get some meat. I offered to do so, and started. It must have been about six miles there and six back in soft snow, and took me twelve hours of continuous walking. So that was over 24 hours going. I got lots of seal-meat, and one Adelie penguin. Another one walked into camp and was killed by Mawson. The bag which I carried back must have weighed 40 to 50 lbs.

(DEC.) 5TH

Spent in eating & sleeping.

(DEC.) 6TH

Advanced 3 miles, in a devious course, though ground is not very bad. Made about 1½ miles to the good. Rations a bit short.

(DEC.) 7TH

Very like yesterday. Sky was much overcast, making it very difficult to see our way, but we made good travelling. In the afternoon a strong southerly wind began to blow, and clouds cleared away. We are on short rations both of biscuit and seal meat. Our biscuit now runs to one for breakfast, 1½ lunch and ½ dinner, but all these measurements are short.

(DEC.) 8TH

Very heavy pulling through deep, soft snow. Fine view of Mt Nansen range, and pass or glacier to south of it, up which we are to travel to reach the plateau. Glacier appears rather rough, I am afraid.

DEC. 9TH

During a reconnaissance today, I saw the whole of Terra Nova Bay clear of ice, and a long stretch of the barrier edge, with what may be called the Nansen barrier beyond. The barrier edge appears about 5 miles off. All flat going ahead, but if the surface is

anything like what we have passed over today it will be the worst of pie-crust snow. The professor saw a Wilson petrel. I saw a flock of half-a-dozen snow petrels and three skuas. Mount Melbourne is smoking actively.

DEC. 10TH

We seem to have got out of the rough stuff, and are now heading for Mt Melbourne. Although we have ascended several hillocks since the one from which I had my view yesterday, we have not had nearly so good a one again. I estimate the barrier edge to be about 10 miles off. Our depôt (to be) at about 20. Rations are very short, and I am hungry. I feel as if we had very little chance of the pole.

Two or three days journey now will show us.

DEC. 11TH

Really a joyful day. Marched 3 miles 1000 yds. Camped within about a mile of the sea and 5 or 6 miles of the foot of Nansen glacier. Everything seemed to jump closer to us this morning. The Nansen glacier looks good going, icy, and not very rough. The low sloping shores marked on map appear to be a mystery or a myth. Lots of seals in sight.

DEC. 12TH

Shifted camp on about a mile, then after a long confab between Mawson and Prof. decided we might as well form our depôt here, on top of an ice knoll. I was sent off to kill seals and penguins to be cooked for the plateau trip. Worked along where "sea-ice" is marked on sketch chart, and killed six seals, three Emperors and one Adelie penguin. It was rather disgusting work. The sun was very warm, and though I fell through the ice of a tide crack up to the waist, I never felt very cold, and my clothes, all but my boots, dried on me.

DEC. 13TH

Spent in making small repairs, and eating. But the Prof. as usual will not let us sleep enough.

DEC. 14TH

Eating my best and writing letters. These are last adieus, so they ought to be tragic, but I cannot make mine so, as I feel we have such a good chance of reaching the pole. Fixed up our depôt finally.

DEC. 15TH

Woke to find a blizzard blowing from the plateau. There are no signs here of the South-Easterly blizzards that we used to have at the hut. I was glad to keep to the bag, as our stay here has not been much of a rest. Two front poles, by getting covered with rough ice, very nearly wore their way through the tent.

Today we started our full rations, with seven biscuits a day.

DEC. 16TH

Still blowing in the morning, but moderated about 5 a.m. We struck camp and started with our single sledge at 7 a.m. and by 10 a.m. had done 3 miles 1500 yds, at which I, at any rate was pleased. Camped.

(DEC.) 17TH

Run of 9 miles 100 yds over level barrier surface, sometimes very soft. Crossed several cracks, in one of which sea-water was showing. Barrier appears to be not more than 20 feet above sea level. At present we are camped in front of a broken barranca⁶ some 20 or 30 feet deep and 100 yds wide.

(DEC.) 18TH

Run, 9 miles 350 yds. Good surface, but several large undulations across our track, almost a mile from crest to crest, and I suppose about 100 ft high, so it was a pretty good performance. These waves in the barrier are caused, I suppose, by pressure from the glacier, and are roughly concentric round its mouth. We seem to be still about 5 miles from glacier foot, though I thought that our depôt was at that distance. We passed a considerable moraine outcrop in the middle of the barrier.

DEC. 19TH

Day began with snow, fog and wind. No land visible. Started by compass due magnetic south. After passing over two undulations, came to a sheet of flat ice with tide-cracks, showing open water, which tasted salt, ice at edge of cracks apparently 1 ft thick. Whole thing most puzzling. Passed off this ice up very steep incline on to another large ice wave. Much crevassed. Mawson fell right into one out of sight and it was a job to get him up. Lunched soon after. Fog lifted a little, but settled again. Made a short reconnaissance and then dined and turned in. It is blowing and snowing, and looks bad for the pole.

DEC. 20TH 5 P.M.

Up at 8 a.m. Foggy. Determined to abandon attempt on Nansen glacier. Though I voted against this. Started south Easterly skirting round Mt Larsen. Ice is undulating and crevassed and there is six inches of soft snow on surface which conceals crevasses, and sometimes jams the sledge altogether. At 4 p.m. a blizzard at about temp. of +32° F sprang up from E.S.E. Stopped and camped. For the last few days we have been much troubled by the dampness of everything, due to temperatures above freezing point.

(DEC.) 21ST

Up at 2 a.m. Fog cleared away and we resolved to reconnoitre towards foot Larsen glacier. Roped up and walked in that direction, but found the ground broken by pools of water, ice-ridges, crevasses and snow drifts more than a foot deep. Returned and lunched, and then reconnoitred up a snow-slope apparently curving over a spur of Larsen and leading on to Larsen glacier. Reached a height of 1500 feet. Slope far too steep, and snow 18 inches deep and very soft. But must try it. On the way back, the noise of running waters in every direction was quite loud and we heard several considerable streams in the ice under our feet. Got a good view

of Nansen glacier, which I am afraid is too rough to be practicable.

DEC. 24TH

Had a bad attack of snow-blindness, result of doing our reconnoitring without snow spectacles. It was really most painful. We are now camped 800 feet up, on our snow slope, having tackled it with half-loads. We found a good route in to the foot of slope, but directly we got there a blizzard from the plateau sprang up. We had just time to get tent up when it was on us hard, and blew for 24 hours harder than anything I have ever experienced in a tent. It ripped the tent in two places, and split the peak of it. So this morning Mawson and I patched it, which was very cold work. We found the whole tent very rotten, and I don't think it will stand another blow such as we had. The blizzard has done good though by clearing the soft snow off the slope, and leaving large patches of bare ice. But for this we could never have got up at all. We have got things up the glacier so far in half-loads.

DEC. 25TH

No Christmas luxuries at all. It was blowing very hard in the morning and so after breakfast we got into the bag again till the wind went down at about noon. Then started up our glacier with fully loaded sledge. Did 3 miles and reached a height of 2000 ft. Our blizzard glacier opens on to the one coming down between Larsen and Bellingshausen at this height. Our camp is on the middle of this glacier. Going good. Temp. about +25, wind about 15 miles an hour.

(DEC.) 26TH

Did 8 miles and rose to 3280 feet. I am well pleased, as surface was spoiled in afternoon by a light fall of snow. The clouds have been rolling about, spoiling the view, but sometimes producing beautiful effects. They are coming in from the sea, with a very light N.E. wind. Temp. +26. We must be situated somewhere at the back of Mt

Larsen and can see, down on our left, what I think must be the Drygalski glacier.

(DEC.) 27TH

Run 10 miles. Altitude 4050 ft. Temp. from +7° at 8 a.m. to +23° at 2 p.m. Slight N.W. wind. Sunny generally, clouding over more in afternoon. I remark that these clouds, above and to the west of us, move very very slowly, taking hours to alter shape. One large one straight in front of us seemed as if it were leading us to the promised land.

The day's run is good, as we did not get started till 11 a.m. We spent some hours forming a depôt of ski-boots, ice-axes, alpine-rope and a few odds and ends, lightening the sledge about 24 lbs. We really left our glacier this morning, and have been fairly on the plateau all day. We are dipping Mt Larsen behind us, and are opening out some old friends, Mt Bowen, Howard, etc. to the Southward.

DEC. 28TH

Run 10 miles. Altitude 4650 ft. And we had to dip into a hollow about 100 ft deep, caused by head of Nansen glacier. Besides this we stopped for 1 hr. after for Mawson to take dip observations. So I am pleased on the whole. We are not losing strength. M. is afraid that his observations make the pole farther than he had placed it, that is 170 miles from here. He cannot be certain, however, without more observations. The day began very warm, +23 and completely overcast, but now, 8.20 p.m. it feels much colder. We are, I suppose, about 20 miles south of Nansen, and have a splendid view of it, and the tail end of what is probably the Mt Baxter range. We can still see Larsen to its base—that is, where it rises from the plateau, but we lost it when we were in the bottom of the hollow. Mawson now says that the nearest the pole can be is 170 miles and the farthest, 230. If the former, we can do it, if the latter, we may possibly.

DEC. 29TH

Run 11 miles!!! Grand! Alt. 5280 ft. Day

began cold, +7 at 8 a.m. with a breeze. D - d uncomfortable. Breeze freshened and lasted all morning. Mawson took a meridian altitude, which tended to confirm opinion that we have only 160 miles to do.

Mt Nansen in full view from behind, and we go on opening up peaks to the North of it. Mts Larsen, Bellingshausen, Neumayer and Bowen seen at intervals, we lose them, when we dip into a hollow, which may be otherwise quite imperceptible. Feeling the exhaustion and hunger awfully, but the less said about it the better.

(DEC.) 30TH

Run 11 miles, 5900 feet. Temp. 8 a.m. -1. Rose to +7, never higher, and breeze until mid-afternoon. In the middle of this ripped a hole six inches long in tent. Had to patch it in the breeze. It was intense torture. We have opened two more peaks to N.E. Don't know their names. We also saw a short, hog-backed, crevassed ice ridge, about 5 miles to N. of our course.

(DEC.) 31ST

Run 10 miles, 6500 ft Temp. 10 a.m. -1. Max. +9. Almost calm all day. But we all agreed that none of us ever felt a day's pulling harder. I was nearly dead. M. took a dip observation, which makes the pole farther off than ever. I hope we are not growing weaker. We had some steep hills to go up, and there are steeper ahead. In fact there is a crevassed ice-ridge on our left front, running across our course, but pretty smooth straight ahead. The tent needed more repairing. Luckily the weather was calm. A skua came and sat down beside us as we were pitching camp!

JAN. 1ST

We all wished each other happy New Year, and we ought to be happier than we were at Christmas, for we have a much better prospect of reaching the pole.

Run 10 miles. Altitude 6980 Temp. +6 to +17, no wind.

The snow slopes did not prove so steep

as we expected, but the surface generally has been very soft, making the pulling very hard. A sort of rumour started that the meter was under-registering, to the extent of only showing 3 miles for 4 covered, but I don't believe in it. Mawson is giving us a special thick hoosh, by way of a New Year's day dinner. I have just finished it, and could easily eat three more of the same. Of course our hunger is simply agonising. Well, we can't have more than a month of it now.

The Admiralty mountains are hid in mist.
62 miles from Larsen depot.

JAN. 2ND

10 miles, 7250 ft Temp. pretty steady about +8. Little wind. A dreadfully heavy day, with bad pie-crust surface and several undulations. It is all we can do, under such conditions to keep up our 10 miles. We are all absolutely exhausted, and I am afraid growing weaker. The undulations make me anxious, as of course they will tell against us coming back. I see, on looking back that I have not yet explained that our plan is to go on at 10 miles a day till the 15th, then turn, hoping to come back at 15 miles a day. At present I think we ought just to be able to do this.

Prince Albert Mts, especially one peak which we think must be Mt Queensland are showing up well, the plateau sloping towards it. But we have lost Mt Larsen and can only see the top cap of Mt Nansen. 72 miles from Larsen depôt.

JAN. 3RD

10 miles, 7810 ft. Temp. +8 to +1 did not get into camp till 9 p.m. after the heaviest day's pulling we have had; larger undulations and softer snow. Mawson took another meridian altitude, which makes it certain that we are only doing 10 miles a day, the meter being correct, and he having made a mistake in working out his last sight. We can now see 100 miles or so of snow-covered plateau stretching away N.W. of Mt Queensland, but without any high or conspicuous peaks. In fact, it surprises me a

good deal that the mountains that appear so rugged and irregular from the sea, should form such a smooth, continuous wall to the plateau as they do on this side. We can only be sure of one pass or gap through this wall, which is seen distinctly to the south of Mt New Zealand. Our hunger is too dreadful to speak of, but it is not for more than a month now. Twelve days, and we will be scudding back all we know. 82 miles from Larsen.

JAN. 4TH

10 miles, 7850 ft. Temp. -5 to +6. Day began with a stiff breeze which blew strong all morning, but died down soon after lunch. Surface improved slightly after lunch, and it is almost dead level. We all complained much of exhaustion at lunch, but as it was Mawson's last day of cooking he managed to give us a little extra biscuit, so we pulled hard in the afternoon. Tent tore again, and I patched it, but no wind, so not very cold.

Sky is now almost completely overcast, the first time we have had an overcast sky. No landmarks visible.

92 miles from Larsen.

JAN. 5TH

10 miles, 7950 ft +17!! overcast and calm. Quite level and fairly good surface. Not feeling so tired. I am cooking now, so no time to write much. This is half way from Larsen depôt.

102 miles.

JAN. 6TH

10 miles, 8000 ft -4 to +7. Slight blow from S.W. Calm and warm in evening. Not so tired, but sick of the whole show. Surface fair. 112 miles.

Suffering much from split lips.

JAN. 7TH

10 miles, 8700 ft. -13 to -3 and a stiff breeze most of the day with very bad surface. I never felt so exhausted and hungry. Mawson took sights, which tally with cyclometer record.

80 miles to go, and 122 miles done from Larsen.

Mt Queensland was in sight at lunch, but we have lost it this evening. The cold is becoming trying.

122 miles.

JAN. 8TH

10 miles 8900 -15 to -10. A most dreadful day, a strong blizzard almost abeam, and very bad surface. I never felt in lower spirits. We tore the tent badly in putting it up for lunch and had to patch it while it was up, after dinner. All clothes which were out drying got covered with snow drift, and my hands went completely several times. Pray God we may never have such another. We marched right through it. 132 miles.

JAN. 9TH

10 miles 9000 ft. -3 to -7 calm, and surface better, more cheerful all round. 142 miles.

JAN. 10TH

11 miles 9000 ft. Temp. -7 slight southerly wind, taking us abaft the port beam. Mawson took sights, which confirm our position as shown by compass and cyclometer. The 11 mile run was not all done today, but was the sum of several daily increments. All cheerful. 153 miles.

JAN. 11TH

11 miles, 9000 ft. Temp. -12 to -5. The wind blowing fresh on port quarter, and a fair surface. Also, I believe, a slight slope in our favour. I don't like all this, as it makes me anxious about getting back.

164 miles.

JAN. 12TH

11 miles, 9000 ft. Temp. -15 to -3 but such a bright sun and so calm as to feel quite warm. Day began cold, however, and with a fairly dense fog which soon lifted. There was no wind, but the sastrugi⁷ though confused, are on the whole, in the direction of the last two days wind. This is very interesting. In weather like

this, sledging is "sledging de Luxe" but for the awful hunger, which weakens us all, and has a bad effect on our tempers. Today, during halts, we passed the time by planning menus for two dinners, a Scotch and a Yorkshire, to be given in Sydney. Here is mine:-

Hors d'Oeuvre

Scotch Woodcock

Potage

Sheep's Head Broth

Poisson

Tasmanian Trout, fried with Oatmeal

Pièces de Resistance

Boiled Singed Sheep's Head, garnished with Carrots, turnips, onions and kale.

Grouse

Notable Omission

Entremets

Haggis, with sloak⁸ if possible, or spinach and mushrooms, to be played round the table by a piper.

Sweets

Grosit Tairt. Bramble Jam Rolly-Polly. (Hot bramble jam to be handed round with this.)

Oatcakes and Scotch cheese. Short-bread and Black Bun

Wines

Scotch Whisky (Bell's Perth or Lagavulin)

Scotch Ale

Australian Claret

It is wonderful what a lot we think and talk about our bellies. I could almost eat my Finnskoe.

We should be at the pole now in three days. The compass still acts, though very sluggishly.

175 miles.

JAN. 13TH

13 miles. 9000 ft. Temp. -6 to +2. Overcast almost all day. Calm, or with puffs from South.

Last night Mawson made the astounding announcement that the pole is prob. 40 miles farther off than we had ever thought.

He is led to think this from re-reading the Discovery "reports" and from his own observations. We were left to think over this during the night, and in the morning, after a very heated discussion, we determined to take it on. I, of course, agreed to go if the others were decided, but I said plainly, as I think now, that we have not more than a 50 per cent chance of getting back to the coast in time for the "Nimrod" to take us home. My reasons for thinking so are:— That the Professor is very nearly crocked now, and we are both weak. That we have no reason to suppose that the first half of the journey back will be a bit easier than what we have done, since any wind we have had during this part of the journey has been abeam or astern of us, and the sastrugi point to this being the prevalent wind; and last that we are making no allowance for weather so bad that we cannot travel. So that is how I feel.

At present, Mawson promises to turn the sledge homewards on the morning of the 18th and hopes to make an average run of 13 miles a day, thus getting us to the sea on the 7th. I feel little the worse of our 13 miles today. But the Professor looks quite crocked up.

Mawson made the pole 50" distant by dipping circle today at noon. That is about 45 statute miles. But it was a rough reading.

188 miles.

JAN. 14TH

12 miles, Aneroid unreliable. Temp. -6 to zero. Perfect weather, blue sky with Noah's Ark clouds. Wind very light, but hauling more aft on port side, as also are sastrugi. I have an impression that we have been going down hill, and cannot help feeling anxious. Surface has been much rougher, evidently ploughed up by violent winds. I feel the pinch in my belly very bad.

200 miles.

JAN. 15TH

14 miles. Altitude? Temp. -20 to -6. Southerly wind of 12 miles per hour, sky

perfectly clear. Mawson took dip at lunch, got 89° 45" which he says means we are about 30 miles from pole, which I cannot understand. Anyhow tomorrow is to be our turning day. We are to take the sledge on 8 miles and walk 5, but I shall describe later. We have this evening 22 days rations left, on our twice diminished scale, namely:— six biscuits a day, and about two thirds of a mug full of solid pem. among the three of us twice a day, with tea, cocoa, milk and sugar. It sounds not so bad, but is really little more than half rations.

If weather holds out, and we can keep up 13 miles a day, we will get back all right. If not, then God help us.

214 miles.

JAN. 16TH

Up at 4.30. Took sledge on with full load 2 miles, then off-loaded everything but tent, sleeping-bag, two days' food and a few clothes. Sledged on other 6 miles, camped, lunched at 10.30. We are going to walk on from here another 5 miles with a compass, to where Mawson thinks the pole must be. Last night he took a dip-reading, giving him 0° 12" off the perpendicular.

3.45 p.m. Just returned from magnetic pole, five miles to N.W. of our camp here. We hoisted a Union Jack there, and the Professor in a loud voice, annexed the place. Mawson photographed the three of us by means of a string attached to camera. Then it was only at my suggestion that the Prof. called for three cheers for the King. At the pole, the compass still pointed, very sluggishly, towards the N.W.

The weather perfect, bright sun, but with slight wind from South, which plays Old Harry with my lips. The lower one is now almost completely bare of skin, and so split that my mouth has a three cornered appearance.

But we are all in the best of spirits.

9 p.m. Camped at off-load, that is, a days run of 24 miles.

None of us are crocked. The afternoon has been absolutely glorious, a flat calm,

with hot sun. We are talking of doing 15 miles a day on the road home.

JAN. 17TH

(Glypsometer reading in morning 96.7)

Run 16 miles, Alt. Temp. -2 to +2

Camped on site of our camp of 14th, that is 200 miles from Larsen. Weather very warm, a complete calm, or very faint wind from W.N.W. God is very good to us.

I am greatly pleased with the day's work, the more so, as the surface is not particularly good, and we all think we have been running up hill, though the aneroid is suffering from a contusion, and Mawson won't run the hypsometer.

Our outward bound tracks are clearly visible.

We talk of reaching the coast on the 3rd.

JAN. 18TH

Run 16 miles. Temp. -17 to -3 Alt.? Very light southerly wind. Some high clouds lifting from S. I believe we could have done another mile or two, but Mawson complained of pain in his leg, and the Professor was utterly crocked. I stupidly lost my warm pyjama jacket off the sledge, so I hope we will be down in warmer weather soon. Our old tracks (five days old now) are still plain, and of course we follow them. This saves M. a great deal of trouble in navigating.

The Prof. (cook for this week, ending today) has been able to give us three or four tremendous fine hooshes, which have an undoubted effect on our pulling.

184 miles from Larsen.

JAN. 19TH

Run 16 miles. Temp. -12 to -5. Alt. Southerly wind of 12 to 15 miles an hour blowing most of the day, with drift at times. Very soft surface part of the way, and some up-hill. I don't think I have ever felt so utterly done. At the end, I couldn't stand for half-a-minute or so. But we will seldom have more trying days. Mawson put some sugar in the hoosh this morning

by way of experiment, and I am sorry to say, I lost my temper with him so far as to say he was selfish. He objected to this, so I apologised. We all felt the cold very acutely this morning, and through the day, far more so than the -17 or -19 which we have had on fine, still mornings.

168 miles from Larsen.

JAN. 20TH

Run 16 miles. Alt. Temp. -20 to -6. Wind pretty steady on starboard beam and tending to haul aft, very slight drift. Surface rather soft, and we have quite left behind the large sastrugi of 17th and 18th. I am not quite so tired as last night, and I am pleased at doing 16 miles, in spite of having had such a tiring day and only seven hours sleep after it. We are all feeling the cold badly, so Mawson proposed at lunch today, that as we were keeping up the pace so well, we should increase rations. This was agreed to, and the result is a most splendid hoosh tonight. We are now on ground covered on the outward journey on the 10th, and can still see our old tracks faintly. One awkward discovery is that we have no tea ration for this week, so we pick up the old used muslin bags of tea at the old camps as we pass, and use them again.

152 miles.

JAN. 21ST

Run 16 miles. Alt. by hypsometer 196.7 deg. at lunch. Temp. -20 to -3. Wind as yesterday, but rather lighter and we are feeling a bit warmer, partly by reason of the increased rations, no doubt. Also I don't feel so horribly exhausted and inclined to vomit up my food, as I have done for the last two or three days.

We are now getting seven biscuits a day.

Surface was rather bad for the last 3 miles, a good deal of "piecrust" snow. We hope to have the wind a little abaft the beam tomorrow. Our tracks of the 8th (the blizzard day) are still visible, which strikes me as most remarkable, the more so as camping grounds are pretty well snowed

up, and we have not been able to get any more tea-bags, they being buried by drift snow.

136 miles.

JAN. 22ND

Run 15 miles. Alt. by Hypsometer 196.75 at lunch. Temp. -20 to -3. A dreadfully hard day. We had to stop at fifteen miles as it was growing so late. I am in pretty fair agony for want of sleep, as we only get 8 hours in the bag, and half of that time is spent in shivering. The strain of the whole thing, the exhaustion and actual muscular pain, the cold, the want of food and sleep, the monotony, and the anxiety as to what is to happen at the end, make me think that this must be the most awful existence possible. My thumb nails are both coming off from frost-bite.

We lost the old tracks after lunch today, and almost at the same time I picked up Mt Queensland, which is most opportune, as it gives us a point to steer by.

The surface has been utterly shocking.

121 miles out.

JAN. 23RD

Run 16 miles, Alt. 196.78 (Hypsometer at lunch) Temp. -19.5 to -6, but the sun felt brighter and warmer. The wind was on starboard quarter, but fell almost to a calm after lunch. Surface fair. No great drop in altitude. The aneroid readings at this stage of the outward journey appear to exaggerate the height. I blistered my heel badly owing to freezing of finnikoe.

105 miles out.

JAN. 24TH

Run 16 miles. Alt. by hyps. at lunch 197.68 deg. Temp. -15 to -7. Day began with strong S.W. wind, very cold. Surface being fair, we did almost 3 miles first stage, but things got gradually worse. In afternoon surface was as bad as we have ever had it. We discussed putting up the sail, but did not do so, as wind was only just abaft the beam. About mid-afternoon we picked up

our outward-bound tracks, from the W. side. They are much weatherworn, standing up in relief in some places, and quite drifted over in others. Mt Queensland is now on our port bow, Mt Baxter showing to E. of it, but no sign yet of old Nansen.

89 miles out.

JAN. 25TH

Run 16 miles. Alt. by hypsometer at lunch 197.7. Temp. -15 to -6. A most trying day, ending well. Began with strong S.W. wind and drift, gradually rising to regular blizzard of about 20 miles an hour, with thick drift, blowing right abeam. The surface was very bad, and we were all in low spirits in the morning. The wind providentially went down while we pitched camp for lunch, so we did not tear the tent. The wind dropped a little, and the surface got better about mid afternoon, and large undulations, a mile or so from crest to crest, began to appear. Mt Nansen hove up, but the view of the mountains is not good owing to thick stratus clouds between us and them. We must have dropped a few hundred feet since lunch I think. Mawson has just given us a cup and a half of splendid thick hoosh, as it is his last cooking night. I take on tomorrow. We feel as if we had come to the down grades at last.

73 miles out.

JAN. 26TH

Run 14 miles. Alt. Temp. -10 to zero.

Day began with a blizzard but surface fair and downhill.

After lunch surface got much better, though sastrugi very large. It calmed and came on such a thick fog as to be like twilight. The mountains were all obscured, there was no sun and no shadow. The wind was uncertain, and puffy. Mawson and professor, without crampons, began to stumble, so we stopped and pitched camp.

59 miles

JAN. 27TH

Run 16 miles Alt. 200° by Hypsometer

at lunch. Temp. zero to +5/-5(sic). Day began with distant mist, which gradually cleared, giving us a perfect day. We all felt great lassitude, which we attributed to the comparative warmth. Sighted Larsen just after lunch. It is not much fun sighting your objective 50 miles off, you approach it so very slowly. We had a glorious view of Nansen, Baxter and Queensland, with the clouds wreathing away from them. We had one bit of sharp down-hill, but on the whole, the going was disappointingly heavy.

43 miles.

FEB. 1ST

7 p.m. Nansen Barrier

We have been going so hard, I have been cooking, and suffering so much from snow-blindness for the last few days, that I have had no time to write anything.

Since last entry, we did two days of 20 miles each, with the sail up, and a blizzard behind us. The going was splendid with a steady down-hill, and glassy surface, and we could have done more, but Mawson's knee was strained, my heels badly blistered, and the Pro. hardly able to move.

This brought us to our depôt at the head of Larsen glacier, where we camped and got into shi-boots. Slept of course. Next day, Mawson determined to come straight down Larsen glacier, saying it was quicker than the one we had come up. I opposed this, but was over-ruled. The result was as I feared. We found ourselves at the foot of the glacier among a maze of serae (sic) ice which has taken us two days of the very hardest work to get through.

Our position now is far from satisfactory. We reckon we are 14 miles out from our Drygalski depot with two day's rations on very short allowance. It is so thick and absolutely still that we have had to camp. The worst of all is that there is a foot or so of new soft snow on the ground, which makes sledging almost impossible I mean, we can't be sure of doing more than five or six miles a day.

FEB. 3RD

Noon

Relieved from cooking, thank God. The last week has been so eventful that it would take as much writing about as any ordinary year. Between the time we decided to come straight down the Larsen glacier and now, we have had so many disappointments and difficulties that I don't think anything can daunt us now. The main point is that we have reached the sea, within sight of our Drygalski depôt, but have just been thrown back, by the horn of the little gulf I marked on the map to the North of the depôt. This is due to our having approached the depôt on a wrong bearing. We must now sledge back round the tip of this horn. But we have penguins and seals galore within sight, and have had our first feed of Emperor.

The other important event is that I have deposed the Professor. I simply told him that he was no longer fit to lead the party, that the situation was now critical, and that he must officially appoint Mawson leader, or I would declare him, the Professor, physically and mentally unfit. He acted on my proposal at once. We are now, course, expecting the ship. The Professor says that Shackleton promised to send her to look for us on the 1st, but one can't believe a word he says.

Weights on reaching ship after dinner

Mackay 176 Ibs

Mawson 170

Prof. 150

FEB. 6TH

8 a.m.

While we were inside the tent, having our first good feed of fried seal-meat, cooked over the blubber lamp, we heard a gun go off. Mawson jumped up yelling—"It's a gun from the ship". This was about 4 p.m. Sure enough it was the ship, come right into the creek, and lying within half a mile of us. We all ran to the water's edge, and Mawson went bang down a crevasse more than 20 feet deep. This might have been very serious, but luckily there was soft snow at the bottom,

and he was not much hurt. I can't possibly tell all that happened next, for I must confess my eyes were a little dim.

In less than no time, we were eating anything we could lay our hands on, drinking bubbly wine, and revelling in the sight of friendly faces and the sound of friendly voices. Almost all the news was good, though there was no news of the southern party. We were relieved from a very real peril of death. I had made up my mind that if the ship did not turn up on the 5th or shortly after, we might pretty well give her up. We would then have started down the coast, with all our rations exhausted, that is to say, nothing to live on but seal-meat, and with our tent, and clothes utterly worn out. The Professor could not have lived many weeks and his weakness would have delayed us to such an extent as to finish us. The whole thing is enough to make a man turn religious.

I am away sledging again now, bringing in a depôt that I have not mentioned, which we left about 10 miles back on the barrier. ❄️

SOURCES & NOTES

*Only those relating to Mackay's Diary are included
and as a consequence they have been renumbered.*

1. *The Heart of the Antarctic*, by E.H. Shackleton. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1909.
2. *South to the Pole, the early history of the Ross Sea Sector, Antarctica*, by L.B. Quartermain. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.
3. *Geographical Journal*, 37, Jan. 1911, 103-107.
4. *Ibid.* 37, 1911, 107-108.
5. *Ibid.* 43, 1914, 85-86; 233-234; 410-411.
6. barranca: a deep ravine.
7. sastrugi: parallel snow ridges or furrows formed by the action of the wind.
8. sloak: edible seaweed.

Scientific and popular zoological names are cited as in the original documents.

Note: Minor editing has been done to add consistency and correct spelling errors and omissions (Belingshausen to Bellingshausen, Mt. to Mt, lead to led, etc.).



This Union Jack was made by Bernard Day in winter quarters during the Nimrod Expedition (1907-09). It was taken to the South Magnetic Pole by Mawson, Mackay and David and is shown on the front cover. It hangs today in the Australian Academy of Sciences in Canberra.

Photo: David Burke.

“I am in pretty fair agony for want of sleep, as we only get 8 hours in the bag, and half of that time is spent in shivering. The strain of the whole thing, the exhaustion and actual muscular pain, the cold, the want of food and sleep, the monotony, and the anxiety as to what is to happen at the end, make me think that this must be the most awful existence possible. My thumb nails are both coming off from frost-bite.”

Mackay, David and Mawson at the South Magnetic Pole on 16 January 1909. Photo by Edgeworth David.

