

# Lesson Four: Shaping of the World

## Factsheet for teachers

### Key Questions

- What was the planned journey of the Endurance Expedition?
- What did they actually do to survive?

### An expedition across the continent

The Imperial Trans-Antarctica Expedition 1914-17, also known as the Endurance Expedition, is considered to be the last major expedition of the heroic age of Antarctica exploration. It was led by Sir Ernest Shackleton and it was an attempt to make the first land crossing of Antarctica. Whilst the expedition did not achieve this it is recognised as an epic feat of endurance. The expedition required two ships: the *Endurance* for the Weddell Sea party and *Aurora* for the Ross Sea party.

For the expedition Ernest Shackleton proposed to sail the Weddell Sea and to land a shore party near Vahsel Bay, in preparation for a transcontinental march through the South Pole to the Ross Sea. A supporting group, the Ross Sea party, would meanwhile travel to the opposite side of the continent, establish camp in McMurdo Sound, and from there lay a series of supply depots across the Ross Ice Shelf to the foot of the Beardmore Glacier.

These depots would be essential for the transcontinental party's survival, as the party would not be able to carry enough provisions for the entire crossing. The expedition required two ships: *Endurance* under Shackleton for the Weddell Sea party, and *Aurora*, under Captain Aeneas Mackintosh, for the Ross Sea party.

### The Journey

The ship *Endurance* became beset in the ice of the Weddell Sea before reaching Vahsel Bay. The crew attempted to free the ship, but it was held in the pack ice throughout the Antarctica winter of 1915.

Eventually the ship was crushed and sank. Twenty eight men were stranded on the ice. The crew were forced to spend months in makeshift camps as the ice drifted northwards; they took lifeboats to reach the inhospitable, uninhabited Elephant Island. Shackleton and five other men then made an 800 mile open boat journey in the whaleboat *James Caird* to reach South Georgia using a Thomas Mercer chronometer.

From there, Shackleton was then able to rescue the men waiting on Elephant Island and bring them home. On the other side of the continent, the Ross Sea party also managed to fulfil its mission. The ship *Aurora* was blown from her moorings during a gale and was unable to return leaving the shore party marooned. The crew managed to survive on previously laid depots, but three men were lost in the process.

### Navigating Glaciers and Ice

Teachers can provide context on the difficulties of exploring the Antarctic environment. Go to Discovering Antarctica website for more information on ice and glaciers:

[http://www.discoveringantarctica.org.uk/14\\_exploring\\_ice.html](http://www.discoveringantarctica.org.uk/14_exploring_ice.html)