

D



**AND THE WINNERS ARE ...**  
The Grammy Awards will be announced tonight. See who's on top of the music world Monday in Life.

# Endurance

*Ernest Shackleton's legendary Antarctic expedition may be the ultimate tale of survival against all odds*



FRANK HURLEY, 1914 © SCOTT PEARL PHOTOGRAPHY EDITORS  
Sir Ernest Shackleton, 1914.

By **BEN HARRIS**  
Anchorage Daily News

**G**ale-force winds threatened to crush the tiny lifeboat on the rocky coast of South Georgia. It was the 16th day of a desperate 800-mile passage across the South Atlantic Ocean, one of the world's most turbulent bodies of water. Six men had set sail seeking rescue for 22 shipmates from the *Endurance*, left behind on a frigid Antarctic island.

Fierce winds and waves conspired against the men in the boat. Yet with extraordinary seamanship and luck, the helmsman steered clear of rocky hazards. Then the seas calmed and opened safe passage to land. An amazing journey came to a close, but a story of determination and fortitude lay ahead for the rescue party.

The ocean crossing by the lifeboat James Caird is legendary, but it is just one chapter in a dramatic 20-month journey through the icy seas of Antarctica.

The tale, "The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition," will be told starting Feb. 15 in an exhibit at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

The Cook Inlet Historical Society, partnering with the museum, worked for two years to bring it to Anchorage from the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

The exhibit presents more than 150 stark and fascinating photographs of the sailors' ordeal taken by Frank Hurley, photographer aboard the *Endurance*, who dived into frigid waters to retrieve his glass-plate negatives from the sinking ship. The images will be displayed chronologically and accompanied by gripping memoirs from the voyage. A full-size replica of the Caird will be backed by a projection of stormy seas and accompanied by an interactive computer that allows visitors to experience the challenge of open-boat navigation.

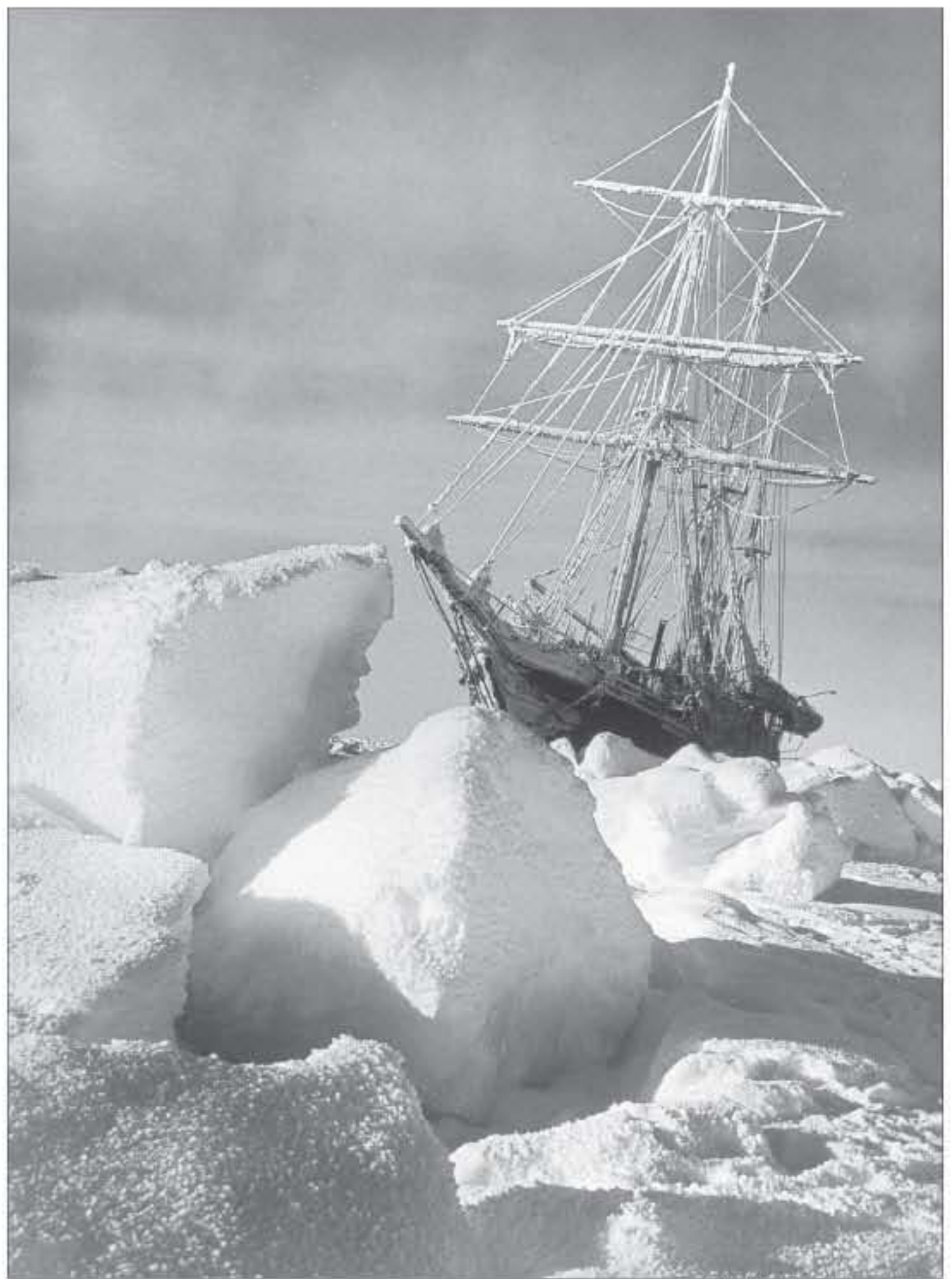
If you don't know the *Endurance* story, you're in for a tale of survival beyond imagination.

**AMBITION**

**F**orty-year-old Ernest Shackleton was a British veteran of Antarctic travels. A member of Robert Scott's 1901 expedition, he had led one of his own in 1907. He wanted to be the first to reach the South Pole but abandoned his

At right, the *Endurance*, which was to carry Ernest Shackleton toward his dream of crossing Antarctica on foot, became locked in ice on her voyage south. Its crew of 28 men would spend 20 months struggling to stay alive.

See Page D-4, **ENDURANCE**



FRANK HURLEY, 1915 © Royal Geographical Society



The *Endurance* cuts through pack ice. The ship's hull was sheathed in greenheart, a durable wood that can withstand battering by ice.

Images by Frank Hurley from the collections of The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), The Scott Polar Research Center and State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

## Shackleton story continues to stir wonder and emotion

By **DEBRA MCKINNEY**  
Anchorage Daily News

**F**irst, you have to wonder what kind of men would respond to an ad like this:  
*Men Wanted for Hazardous Journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe returns doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.*

Then, when these men end up shipwrecked in one of the most hostile places on the planet, a place so cold they could hear water freeze, you have to wonder what kind of leader would defy all logic to save them when he could have just said, "I warned you."

After watching the *Endurance* be swallowed by sea ice in November 1915, expedition photographer Frank Hurley wrote this of their predicament:

"It is beyond comprehension, even to us, that we are dwelling on a colossal ice raft, with but 5 feet of ice separating us from 2,000 fathoms of ocean, and drifting along under the caprices of wind and tides, to heaven knows where."

And that was before things went from worse to infinitely worse.

Expedition leader Ernest Shackleton kept his mind on solid ground, which is among the reasons he went on to become the most suc-

cessful unsuccessful explorer of all time.

Shackleton never accomplished any of his major goals in life. He never reached the South Pole. He never traversed the Antarctic continent. He lost his bid for public office. He lost in moneymaking schemes. He even lost playing golf with his wife.

But after facing vicious storms, paralyzing cold, perpetual sogginess, hunger, illness and the grim reality of their situation, he made it home without one of his 27-member crew being lost. Shackleton is an icon today because he won at what mattered most. He survived the unsurvivable and made sure his men did too, leaving us with an incredible story.

His accomplishment is appreciated much more today than it was in Edwardian England, a time when a dead hero was a good hero. Sir Robert Falcon Scott, upon discovering Roald Amundsen had just beaten him to the South Pole, perished out on the ice instead of returning as an "also ran," a tragedy that cast a total eclipse over what Shackleton managed to do. How did he manage to do it?

Entire books have been devoted to that question, among them "Leading at the Edge: Leadership Lessons from the Extraordinary Saga of Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition" by



FRANK HURLEY, 1915 © SCOTT PEARL PHOTOGRAPHY EDITORS  
Ernest Shackleton was a phenomenal leader who is credited in large part with saving the lives of his 27-man crew on his 1914-16 expedition to Antarctica.

### Learn more about Shackleton and the *Endurance's* voyage

**Online:**  
• Public television's "Nova" series: [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/shackleton](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/shackleton)

• American Museum of Natural History, creator of the Anchorage exhibit: [www.amnh.org/exhibitions/shackleton](http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/shackleton)

• Curator of the original James Caird boat: [www.jamescairdsociety.com](http://www.jamescairdsociety.com)

**In Print:**  
• "Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage" by Alfred Lansing

• "South: A Memoir of the Endurance Voyage" by Sir Ernest Shackleton

• "The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition" by Caroline Alexander

**On video:**  
• "Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure" is available on VHS and DVD at [www.shop.wgbh.org](http://www.shop.wgbh.org).

See Page D-18, **SHACKLETON**

# Endurance

*Continued from D-1*  
 effort 97 miles shy of his destination. The pole was finally claimed in 1911 by Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen. American explorer Robert Peary had staked the North Pole two years earlier.

With the poles claimed by explorers from other countries, Shackleton had a bit of British pride at stake when he proposed his Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. He would cross Antarctica on foot. "It is the last great polar journey that can be made," he said. The *Endurance* set sail from Plymouth, England, at the onset of World War I on Aug. 8, 1914, bound for Argentina. Shackleton and his second-in-command, Frank Wild, stayed behind to make final financial arrangements.

Originally named *Poraris*, the *Endurance* was a fine model of Norwegian shipbuilding. Shackleton renamed the vessel after his family's motto, "Fortitudine vincimus." By endurance we conquer. A three-masted barkentine, the *Endurance* was made from timbers specially selected to withstand ice. She was 144 feet long, had a 25-foot beam, and her sides were 18 to 30 inches thick.

In late October, Shackleton and Wild caught up with the *Endurance* and her crew at Buenos Aires. Twenty-eight men, including a stow-away and 60 Canadian sled dogs, soon got under way for the whaling station Grytviken on South Georgia Island.

The *Endurance* sailors spent a month in Grytviken waiting for tightly packed ice in the Weddell Sea to open. Whalers told Shackleton the ice was the worst they'd experienced; some counseled against his journey. But Shackleton would not be denied a final shot at the prize he'd coveted for so long. He pressed on.

## TOWARD ANTARCTICA

The *Endurance* set sail for the South Sandwich Islands on Dec. 5, 1914. Two days later, the crew encountered heavy pack ice and navigated around icebergs larger than a square mile. The ship headed east and skirted the edge of the ice.

Within a week, the *Endurance* turned south toward Vahsel Bay and was meandering through thick pack ice. Her progress soon slowed to less than 30 miles a day.

Temperatures hovered around 30 degrees on Christmas Day as summer arrived in Antarctica. On Jan. 9, the ice cleared and the *Endurance* traveled at full speed in open water for more than 100 miles.

Ice seas returned within a week and entrapped the *Endurance*. She was "frozen like

an almond in the middle of a chocolate bar," wrote the ship's storekeeper, Thomas Orde-Lees.

Days passed without any sign that the ice would free its catch. Ice squeezed the *Endurance*, making her creak and groan. "Still fast and no sign of any opening," wrote carpenter Henry "Chippy" McNeish. "The pressure is still a serious business, and if we don't get out of it soon I would not give much chance of ever getting away from here."

An excellent lead opened in front of the ship on Feb. 14. All hands were ordered on to the ice to cut a path to the opening. The ship's steam engines fired up, and the *Endurance* worked like a battering ram. The crew made progress but, after two days of cutting and chopping, gave up. Ice up to 18 feet thick thwarted their efforts 400 yards short of the open lead.

Shackleton realized that breaking free of the ice was unlikely. His hopes for crossing Antarctica were set aside as he focused on his responsibility for the 27 men on board.

## SETTLING IN

The crewmen settled in to play a waiting game. They knew that either the ice would break up and free them or the pressure would crush their ship. They set about daily chores and readied the ship for winter. Each man was required to work three hours a day. Some hunted for migrating animals to supplement their food stores. Occasionally they'd catch a 400-pound seal.

As the days grew shorter, the men became a close-knit group. Most got along well. To pass the hours, the men would play pranks, perform skits, play cards, listen to the phonograph (on Sundays), play hockey, practice sledding, watch slide shows given by photographer Hurley, write in their diaries and do chores.

The sun disappeared below the horizon May 1. Temperatures stayed below zero by month's end and averaged minus 17 in early June, but a coal stove kept the men comfortable. The ship's thick sides provided excellent insulation from the elements.

The *Endurance* migrated northwest as the ice floe moved. Occasionally, the ice showed signs of breaking. But through winter, the *Endurance* remained captive.

A series of shocks battered the *Endurance* on the last few days of August. The noises kept the men awake as ice scraped the hull and violent cracks, groans and bumps to the ship, making her jump and shake fore and aft.

Just after midnight there was a series of loud and violent cracks, groans and bumps to the ship, making her jump and shake fore and aft. Capt. Frank Worsley wrote on Sept. 1. Despite the scare, the *Endurance* remained intact.

*The ship groans and quivers, windows splinter, whilst the deck timbers gape and twist. Amid these profound and overwhelming forces, we are the absolute embodiment of helpless futility.*

— *Endurance* photographer Frank Hurley, describing pack ice crushing the ship



The men pull the James Caird, one of three lifeboats from the *Endurance*, across an ice floe. The boat would later be used to cross the sea on an 800-mile journey in search of rescue.

In late September and October, temperatures rose above zero and transformed the ice to a little pond. It appeared the ice might break up. Shackleton, anticipating an opportunity to escape, ordered the ship's engine fired up. A lead opened on Oct. 17, but the engine failed to generate enough steam. Sails were set instead, but the ship would not budge. The lead disappeared by Oct. 18, and the *Endurance* was once again frozen still.

Pressure squeezed and shattered the *Endurance* on Oct. 26. The stern was thrown up 20 feet, decks and beams buckled and broke, and the rudder and sternpost were torn out. "The ship groans and quivers, windows splinter, whilst the deck timbers gape and twist. Amid these profound and overwhelming forces, we are the absolute embodiment of helpless futility," Hurley wrote.

## 'SHE'S GOING, BOYS'

The next day, Shackleton ordered the men to set up camp on the ice. "She's going, boys. I think it's time to get off," he said. The men were a miserable lot. Temperatures plunged to minus 16 as they crowded into thin linen tents.

"The boss," as Shackleton was called by his men, gathered the crewmen and told them of his plan to travel 346 miles northwest across the ice to Paulet Island, where a cache of supplies was stored. Only the most essential gear would be taken. As they embarked on their overland journey, Shackleton held open the ship's Bible and in a dramatic gesture tore out a page from the 23rd Psalm to carry with him. It included this passage:

*Out of whose womb came the ice?  
 And the hoary frost of Heaven,  
 who hath pondered it?  
 The waters are hid as with a stone,  
 And the face of the deep is frozen.*

The men walked over the ice, pulling two lifeboats and sleds weighing as much as 900 pounds each. They traveled only a couple of miles that first day. They chipped and hacked through pressure ridges, but travel was almost impossible. After a few days, they gave up and established Ocean Camp on an ice floe nearly two miles from the ship.

Groups were sent back to the ship to retrieve supplies and another lifeboat. They had enough food to easily last three months. The men settled in. As summer approached, the crew appeared in good spirits. "It has been a lovely day, and it is hard to think we are in a frightfully precarious situation," surgeon Alexander Macklin wrote.

Shackleton had to manage the diverse personalities of the crew. His expedition experience had prepared him well. "He was prepared to go to almost any length to keep the party close-knit and under his control," Alfred Lansing wrote in "*Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage*." "Shackleton felt that if dissemination arose, the party as a whole might not put forth that added ounce of energy which could mean the difference between survival and defeat."

November temperatures rose as high as 35 degrees, and the men stripped to the waist to bask in the sun. They had a daily routine of hunting, preparing boats and gear for break-up, playing poker and telling stories.

The inevitable sinking of the *Endurance* occurred Nov. 21. It "was a shock in that it severed what had seemed their last tie with civilization. It was a finality. The ship had been a symbol, a tangible, physical symbol that linked them nearly halfway around the globe," Lansing wrote.

## ROUTE TO LAND IMPASSABLE

The crew had grown restless by December. Shackleton made plans to move the camp west, 200 miles toward land. The



The crew listens to the gramophone on a Sunday evening in an area of the ship named the Ritz.

men had a great feast, then headed out Dec. 23. Their boots sank into knee-deep slush, and some fell into the water. Shackleton halted the move after 2 1/2 miles.

They set up Mark Time Camp on Dec. 29 on a precarious piece of ice. Conditions were miserable and dangerous. The men were constantly soaked, the ice was slushy and food supplies dwindled. A thousand-pound sea leopard, a type of seal, chased Orde-Lees on the ice, brandishing its teeth. Wild shot and butchered it.

Camp was moved 150 yards to more suitable ice. In mid-January, frigid winds howled in from the southeast. Despite the cold, the men were glad to have their sheet of ice blown northwest, closer to land. By Jan. 21, they had drifted above the Antarctic Circle and were 170 miles from Paulet Island. Meanwhile, groups of men were sent back to Ocean Camp to retrieve much-needed supplies.

*He was prepared to go to almost any length to keep the party close-knit and under his control. Shackleton felt that if dissemination arose, the party as a whole might not put forth that added ounce of energy which could mean the difference between survival and defeat.*

— author Alfred Lansing

Shackleton ordered that four teams of sled dogs be shot because they were no longer needed for travel. Three teams were spared.

The men became obsessed with the wind, hoping it would break the ice and allow them access to open seas. Having to wait made them uneasy. "The worst thing is having to kill time. It seems such a waste yet there is nothing else to do," physicist Reginald James wrote on Feb. 6.

The days dragged on into March. Hope of returning home diminished. "I am absolutely obsessed with the idea of escaping. We have been here over four months on the floe — a time of absolute unutility to anyone. There is absolutely nothing to do but kill time as best one may," Macklin wrote on March 13.

Food supplies grew scarce and temperatures dropped to minus 10 by mid-March. The men joked about who among them was the fattest and would be eaten first by the others if they had to resort to cannibalism.

By late March, land came within view about 40 miles away. The remaining dogs were killed and butchered. The crew had its first hot lunch in more than two weeks. Spirits lifted as the men's bellies were filled and the ice began to break up.

## LAUNCHING THE LIFEBOATS

On April 9, the crew launched its lifeboats — the James Caird, the Stancomb Willis and the Dudley Docker, named after the expedition's sponsors. The temperature was minus 10. The small boats were not made for rough seas, yet the men managed to maneuver them through tall waves and gale winds. Seven days and nights crossing icy waters pushed the men to their limits. Sleep was impossible. High winds and breaking seas splashed the men with spray that stiffened their clothes with ice. Hands and feet grew numb. Some grew seasick. Killer whales swam frighteningly close.

Shackleton changed course several times as winds and currents blew the boats about. Finally, Elephant Island was set as their destination. The landing was difficult, but Shackleton and crew reached it April 16. It had been 497 days since anyone had set foot on land.

Elephant Island was a miserable patch of rock and ice. Frigid winds howled across the crew's exposed gravel spit, shredding their tents and blowing gear around.

All knew that the only chance for rescue would be for a small party to reach a village by boat. Shackleton chose five men to travel with him 800 miles across some of the world's most treacherous waters to South Georgia Island. Tom Crean and Timothy McCarthy were seasoned veteran sailors. Worsley was an excellent navigator skilled in the use of sextant and chronometer. McNeish and John Vincent were chosen more for their attitudes than for their skills. Shackleton feared the two might be "difficult" malcontents in camp who could stir up trouble.

They set about preparing the James Caird for her journey, building up her sides and adding a canvas decking. On April 24, Shackleton and the five men shoved off for South Georgia.

Frank Wild was left in charge of the men on Elephant Island. Rescue wasn't expected for weeks, so the crew settled in and tried to make life more comfortable on their frigid spit. They built a makeshift hut from the two remaining lifeboats and canvas. The simple



Crushed by ice in late October 1915, the *Endurance* lay in ruin after being abandoned by her crew. She finally sank in November.

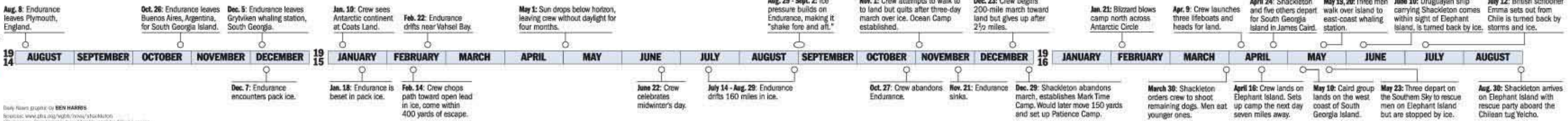
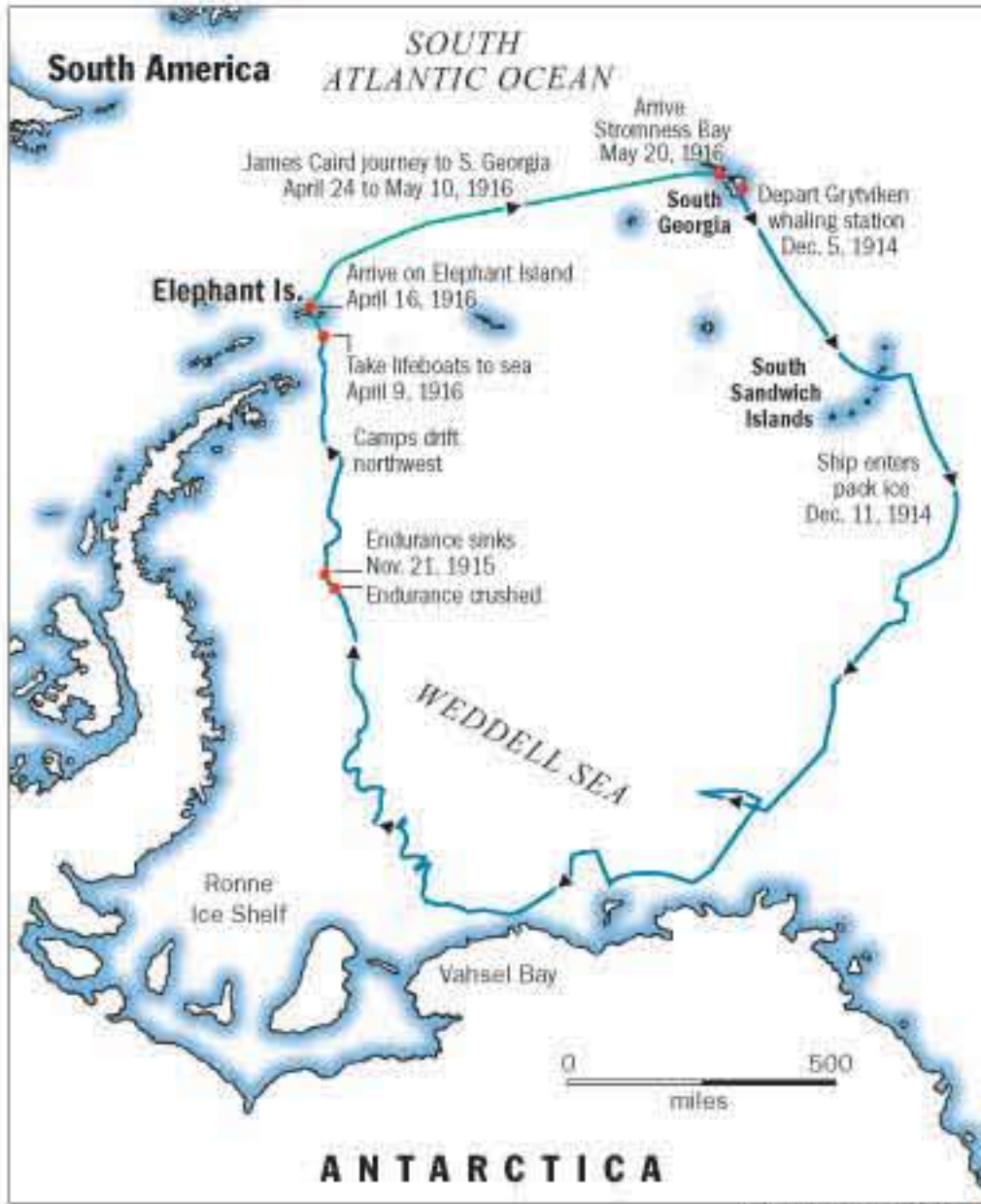


The crew of the James Caird gets a send-off from the men left to wait on Elephant Island. The Caird's journey across 800 miles of dangerous seas was the men's only hope for rescue.

Inspired by Frank Hurley from the collection of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), the Scott Polar Research Center and the Library of the South West, Perth, Australia.

*I am absolutely obsessed with the idea of escaping. ... We have been here over four months on the floe — a time of absolute unutility to anyone. There is absolutely nothing to do but kill time as best one may.*

— surgeon Alexander Macklin



Daily News graphic by BEN HARRIS  
 Sources: www.dna.org/night/voices/shackleton  
 "Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage," by Alfred Lansing

## RESCUE: Desperate men set sail in lifeboat

Continued from D-5

space was kitchen, bathroom, living room, bedroom and recreation room. It was a squalid residence.

The Antarctic winter brought blizzards, short days and a scarcity of food, but life was bearable. Matters grew more desperate for a few men in need of medical attention. Engineer Louis Rickinson recuperated from a heart attack. Perce Blackborow's frostbitten foot became infected, and navigator Hubert Hudson suffered from a large abscess on his buttocks. The men waited and kept a vigilant watch for the return of Shackleton.

### VOYAGE OF THE CAIRD

The James Caird's crew alternated four-hour watches. Above deck, the men were constantly soaked by icy waves. Resting below provided little relief as the men slept atop stone ballast, huddled among rotting and slimy reindeer sleeping bags.

Gales pounded the Caird most days. The boat rolled on top of waves as high as 50 feet, pitching violently. Seas frosted the Caird in ice as thick as 15 inches. The predicament "lost all elements of awesomeness, and (the crew) found it routine and commonplace instead, as a group of people become inured to the perils of living in the shadows of an active volcano," Lansing wrote.

The men were chafed by their salty wool clothes, and their feet became puffy, white and numb. There was no escape from the discomfort. They could only press on.

Clouds and gray skies obscured the sun and gave Worsley few opportunities to take sightings by sextant to fix the Caird's position. Instead, he relied mostly on his sailor's skill of dead reckoning to plot course and distance.

On the 14th day of their journey, the men spotted seaweed and a cormorant. The

next day, they saw land. Their mouths were parched. Their drinking water had been tainted with salt. Land was within reach, but a final gale pounded the Caird with 40-foot seas.

"It now seemed that everything — the wind, the current and even the sea itself — were united in a single determined purpose: once and for all to annihilate this tiny boat, which thus far had defied all their efforts to destroy it," Lansing wrote.

Incredible seamanship and determination led the men ashore on May 10 after 17 days at sea.

### CROSSING SOUTH GEORGIA

The Caird's landing spot on the west coast of South Georgia was 22 miles as the crow flies from Stromness Bay. Shackleton chose Worsley and Crean to join him in crossing the island's uncharted interior on foot. They prepared for a light and fast journey. Each man took three days' rations of food. Gear included 50 feet of rope, a Primus stove, cooking supplies, compasses, binoculars and a carpenter's adze to use as an ice ax. They wore threadbare wool underwear and clothes. The soles of their boots were fitted with screws for traction.

One morning, the skies cleared and the three men headed into the mountains. Throughout the day, roped together, they crossed crevasse-lined glaciers, making a few turns down impassable routes. As night approached, they were atop a pass extending to a steep, snowy slope. Fearing they would freeze if they stayed at high altitude overnight, Shackleton decided they should slide down the slope tied together. They descended 1,500 feet in minutes.

### CIVILIZATION

The group traveled through the night. By sunrise, they reached a gap in the ridges and looked down upon the

familiar formations of Stromness Bay. At 6:30, Shackleton heard what he thought was a whistle awakening whaling crews at the bay. He expected another whistle would blow at 7, signaling the men to work. Indeed, the whistle blew. Shackleton had succeeded.

The three weary men arrived after 3 p.m., nearly 36 hours after heading out from the west coast. Shackleton asked to be taken to the station manager, Thoralf Sørle. Sørle recognized a voice from the past, welcomed Shackleton and treated him and his men to a bath, a shave, new clothes and a hearty dinner.

Sørle dispatched a whaling crew to retrieve the three men remaining on the west coast. McNeish, McCarthy and Vincent arrived at Stromness Bay on May 22 with the Caird.

On May 23, Shackleton embarked on the first of three failed attempts to rescue his men by ship. Pack ice prevented them from making landfall on Elephant Island.

Finally, on Aug. 30, 1916, a boat came within view of the men on the island. It was the steel-hulled Chilean tug Yelcho. Shackleton dropped into a landing boat and traveled toward shore. It had been four months and six days since he'd left the men on Elephant Island.

"Are you all right?" Shackleton called out.

"All well," responded the men.

Within an hour, the crew and their few possessions were loaded on the Yelcho. Not a soul had been lost.

■ Ben Harris is a Daily News page designer. He can be reached at bharris@adn.com. Information for this story came from "Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage" by Alfred Lansing and "Epic of Survival: Shackleton" by Caroline Alexander in National Geographic, November 1998.

## Celebrating adventures both small and great



ANNE HANLEY  
ALASKA STATE WRITER

FAIRBANKS — I recently attended a memorial service for a canoeing buddy of mine. Bev Reitz was a 48-year-old dynamo who worked, paddled and hiked her way across a wide swath of Alaska before an invasive cancer cut her explorations short.

For her memorial, the pews at a Lutheran church were reconfigured into a circle. At the center, there was a long, low container of sand. Bev's final camp was set up on that makeshift sandbar: her pack, her bear barrel, note book, cup and toothbrush. We lit tapers and placed them in the sand around her things, and we told stories about our good times with her.

Organizers of the memorial chose an Eskimo song to go along with pictures of Bev. As I read the words, it occurred to me that many of us, including Bev Reitz, came to Alaska in order to be able to sing our own version of this song:

*And I think over again  
My small adventures  
When from the shore wind I drifted out  
In my kayak  
And thought I was in danger.  
My fears,  
Those small ones  
That I thought so big,  
For all the vital things,  
I had to get and reach.  
And yet, there is only  
One great thing,  
The only thing:  
To live to see in hubs and on journeys  
The great day that dawned  
And the light that fills the world.*

■ From "Songs and Stories of the Netsilik Eskimos," based on texts collected by Knud Rasmussen on the 10th Thule Expedition, edited by Edward Field (New York, Delacorte, 1972). Used with permission. Anne Hanley lives in Fairbanks and will serve as Alaska writer laureate through June.

## COX: Ultra-endurance swimmer hopes her book will inspire dreamers

Continued from D-10

only a matter of time before she ended up in Alaska.

"Alaska is really one of my most favorite places on Earth," Cox said from her hotel room in Boston, where she was on a publicity tour. "Everything is so massive — just the environment itself. And you feel you are in the wilderness, yet the towns are very hospitable."

"Swimming to Antarctica" takes readers to familiar Alaska places as it follows Cox's quest for new waters to conquer. In 1976 and 1977, she swam between islands in the Aleutians, although those swims receive little attention in her book. But she also travels all over the world and, as the title implies, ends with a milelong swim off Antarctica in 32-degree water, the coldest she has encountered.

"That was sort of the hard part about writing the book," Cox said. "At one time the book was much longer, but I had to condense it; I had to draw on the more exciting swims and concentrate on them."

It is a swim in the Bering Sea, from Russia to the United States between Big Diomedes and Little Diomedes islands, that seems to be one of Cox's most exciting adventures. The effort was 11 years in the making and, as Cox puts it, was not just about swimming but was also a chance to cool tensions during the Cold War.

"I had started working on getting corporate sponsorship, but the water was so cold and it was during the height of the Cold War," Cox said. "Nobody was doing anything to support it

because, I think, they just didn't think it could be done."

Not until she reached Alaska, that is. In Chapter 17, "The A-Tears," she described the momentum of the Bering Strait swim as she prepared to make it a reality.

"At the beginning of 1987, I realized that I could spend my entire life working on the Bering Strait swim, trying to get Soviet permission and sponsorship. ... But the Alaskans seemed to understand what I was doing. I got a call from David Karp, who worked at the visitors and travelers bureau in Nome, and he immediately offered to help. ... I also received a call from Dr. Jan Nyboer ... a physician and long-distance runner in Anchorage. He was calling to say he would like to offer his help, to join the swim crew as a medical support person," she wrote.

"That's why I really love Alaska, because I love this attitude that 'Well, so one is doing it, so let's see how we can help you,'" she said. "There is that sense of pioneering, and the people are hard-working and thoughtful. It's generalizing like mad, but I felt that people in Alaska extended themselves to help me out."

One of Cox's favorite swims is featured in Chapter 15, "Glacier Bay." Although she already had swum in the Aleutians, this 1985 swim, across milewide Muir Inlet in 38-degree water, would test her fortitude — and her goal of swimming from Russia to the United States.

In Muir Inlet, she battled

sheets across the water and can slice the hulls of boats. She became numb, had to karate chop the ice to keep going, but refused to acknowledge the cold because to do so would end the journey. With the help of some Gustavus residents willing to guide her by boat, she completed the challenge.

"Turning back for one last second, I looked at all of the Muir Inlet. I wanted to hold that image in my head forever. When things got difficult in life, I would pull it up and remember how amazing it was to be there, to push the limits with the crew, and remember how inspiring the whole experience was," she wrote.

Nyboer said accompanying Cox on her Bering Strait swim was one of the high points of his medical career. A side story within "Swimming to Antarctica" is the medical profession's fascination with Cox's ability to stay warm for hours in water that would send others into cardiac arrest within seconds. Early in her swimming career, she agreed to undergo studies, with probes and monitors attached to her body as she swam under varied frigid conditions. Through most of her cold-water swims, doctors were on-board to monitor her progress and have noted how well she is able to keep her core body temperature constant.

Researchers found that Cox maintains a neutral buoyancy because her fat-to-muscle ratio is perfectly balanced for salt water. In the book, Dr. Barbara Drinkwater describes Cox's physiology as being "at one

with the water."

In the Bering Strait, Nyboer traveled alongside Cox in a skin boat as she completed the 2.7-mile swim in water ranging from 42 to 38 degrees. He was amazed that her body temperature dropped only 3.7 degrees, from 100.7 to 97, over the course of the two-hour, six-minute swim.

"I feel she is one of the most unique athletes in the world, the Everest climber of the water," Nyboer said. "People climb mountains all the time, but how many people have done something like this? You're talking about a unique heroine for our time."

Nyboer theorizes that Cox's unique physiology, combined with her years-long conditioning in cold water, has helped her survive near-freezing swims where others would fail.

"She was used to this long history of increasingly cold swims," Nyboer said. "A normal woman might run around 25 percent body fat, but hers might have been up as high as 35 percent, and that kept her warmer. You've seen these big farmers that look big, but underneath that veneer of fat there's all muscle there. That's how Lynn

is. The average fit male would never have survived anything like this."

While Cox's story is quite sport-specific, the book has universal appeal. She worked on it for 23 years, since her junior year in college, when a professor encouraged her to share her stories. The book's message, Cox said, is of perseverance and mental conditioning. Those who have read it call it inspiring because Cox acknowledges that while growing up,

she was never a sleek, speedy swimmer but a chubby girl who worked hard every day to reach her goals.

"When writing the book, I hoped that readers would want to be carried along on this odyssey so you could see this book is about having dreams and carrying them through," Cox said. "The swimming was just the vehicle to deliver that message."

■ Reporter Melissa DeVoght can be reached at mdevoght@adn.com.