

WHO WAS THE WINNER?

AMUNDSEN OR SCOTT?

A TALK WITH PROFESSOR DAVID.

Professor David, of Sydney University, who accompanied Sir Ernest Shackleton in his dash for the Pole, and who was the leader of the party which reached the South Magnetic Pole, and ascended Mount Erebus, said (to a reporter of the Sydney "Evening News" on Friday) in reference to the report that Captain Scott has reached his goal, and that Amundsen has arrived at Hobart, that it is difficult to understand how these two statements are to be connected together.

There can be no doubt obviously said the Professor, that Amundsen, the famous Norwegian explorer—the first who ever took a ship, in his case the little Gjeia, through the North-West Passage from Greenland to Behring Straits—has actually reached Hobart, in the no less famous ship, the Fram, so well known by the Arctic explorations in her by Nansen and Johansen. The latter is one of Amundsen's party. If the Fram reached Hobart, presumably her first port of call, only this morning, it seems difficult to understand how news through her could have reached London in time for the Wednesday evening London papers to publish the rumour that Captain Scott had reached the South Geographic Pole.

"At present no authentic information has reached me in regard to Captain Scott's expedition since the news brought just a year ago by the Terra Nova (Captain Scott's ship) on her return from the Antarctic after leaving Scott and his party at their winter quarters.

"It was the opinion of experienced Polar explorers that there was a very good chance of both Scott and Amundsen reaching the South Pole, provided that no serious accident was met with in ascending the great Beardmore glacier. This glacier, 160 miles in length, ascends in that distance to a height of about 8,000ft. above sea-level. The ice of which it is composed is seamed with innumerable and very formidable crevasses, i.e., immense cracks, from 3ft. up to 50ft. in width, and penetrating the ice to depths of over 1,000ft. These are concealed from view by treacherous coverings or lids of snow, drifted over them by the blizzard winds, so that they form veritable pitfalls for sledging parties.

"Provided this tremendous glacier can be safely negotiated, there will remain about 400 miles of a high snow plateau to be traversed. Its altitude ranges from 8,000ft. up to over 10,000ft., at Shackleton's furthest south, which was within 112 miles of the South Pole.

"There can be no question that the South Pole itself is situated on a continuation of the plateau discovered by Shackleton, and the height of the South Pole would be approximately 11,000ft. above sea-level.

"Close to further south Shackleton and his party experienced blizzards of terrific force, with temperatures early in January of fully 70 degrees of frost. It can be imagined, therefore, that these last 400 miles of the journey would test all the energy, endurance, and courage of the finest Polar explorers in the world, and it would be hard indeed to choose two finer representatives of the British Empire and Norway respectively than Scott and Amundsen.

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"From the absence of further details it is useless to speculate whether either or both these famous explorers have reached the South Pole, and if both have attained their goal, who got there first. There can be little doubt that in speed of travelling Amundsen had a decided advantage over Scott. Both, if they travelled by way of Beardmore Glacier, would have before them a journey of 800 miles there and the same distance back. For the first 400 miles over the surface of the great ice barrier, Amundsen would use his dogs only, of which he had about 130, the pick of the Greenland sledging teams. Scott, for this first stage, was relying partly on Manchurian ponies and partly on his two powerful motor sledges, and partly on Siberian dogs.

"There can be little doubt that in this first stage of the journey Amundsen would outstrip Scott. Good dogs will driven can travel at from 25 to 30 miles a day for many weeks at a stretch. Scott, with his composite transport could hardly hope to equal this speed.

"In travelling up the Beardmore Glacier both parties would rely on the dogs only, supplemented by man haulage. Their speed of travel up the Beardmore would be about equal in the case of either party. But arrived on the plateau the heavier and more numerous Greenland dogs of Amundsen would have an advantage over the less numerous and lighter dogs of Scott.

"Obviously a great problem in negotiating this difficult journey of at least 1,200 miles (probably 1,500 with occasional necessary detours, as to carry a sufficiency of provisions. In this respect Scott would have a slight advantage up to the foot of the Beardmore Glacier by reason of the powerful traction supplied him by his motor sledges. But from the Beardmore onwards, other things being equal, the advantage of transport of food would again be with Amundsen. On the other hand, Amundsen has a slight disadvantage in that his party is smaller than that of Scott.

"Amundsen's party was stated to be eight or nine in number all told. Scott, on the other hand, has about 30 picked men with him, and proposed to take 12, including himself, to the foot of the Beardmore Glacier, eight to the top of the glacier, and four as far south along the plateau as possible, and then to make the final dash for the Pole with a party of four. There would be probably one sledge, possibly two; one heavy and one light sledge; one man can pull about 2cwt. On the return journey both parties would travel faster than on the outgoing journey, as they would carry little food on their sledges, relying on picking up the food depots laid on the outward journey.

"Whatever the final result proves to have been, there can be no doubt that both these leaders will have put out splendid and heroic efforts in their attempts to reach the much-coveted goal, and will have acquitted themselves in every way worthy of the two great nations which through the centuries have been foremost in polar expeditions.

"The actual reaching of either the North or South Geographic Pole is, of course, chiefly a matter of national prestige; but quite apart from this, very important scientific results may be expected from any party which actually reaches the South Pole, much more important than from a party like Peary's, which reached the North Pole.

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"Situated as it is at the top of the dome of a very high and intensely cold plateau, the South Pole is practically the hub of the meteorological wheel of the Southern Hemisphere. Capt. Scott's party were determined to take systematic meteorological observations to determine the barometric pressures and temperatures, as well as wind force and directions.

"To know just what is happening at this meteorological hub is now of far greater scientific interest than the mere geographical achievement of reaching the Pole."