

Ernest Shackleton

Ernest Shackleton was a renowned polar explorer, who participated in three expeditions to the Antarctic and made many important scientific discoveries.

Early Life

On 15th February 1874, Ernest Henry Shackleton was born in Ireland. He was the second of ten children born to Henry Shackleton, a landowner at the time, and Henrietta Gavan. Ernest's father began training to become a doctor when Ernest was six years old and four years later, the family moved to Sydenham, London, in search of better jobs for his father - now a doctor.



Ernest was schooled by a **governess** at home until he was 11 when he began at Fir Lodge Preparatory School in Dulwich, in southeast London. At the age of 13, he attended Dulwich College. During his childhood, Ernest was a keen reader. He particularly enjoyed reading about fictional adventures, which made him want to go on escapades himself. Although Ernest was very clever, he found school boring and did not enjoy learning about the world by reading about it. Ernest wanted to experience everything for himself.

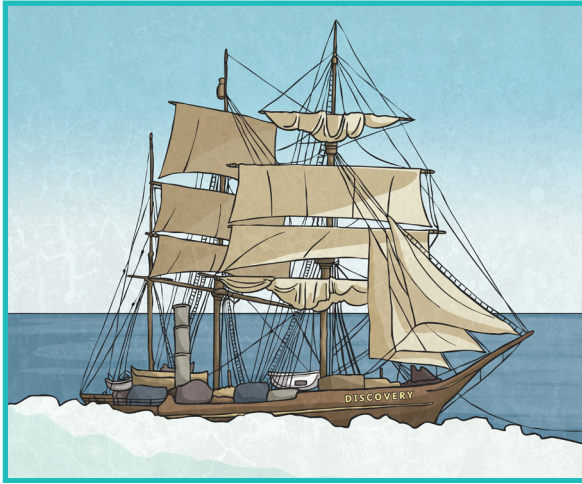
The Merchant Navy

In order to explore the world, Ernest left school at the age of 16 and joined the **merchant navy**. He became an **apprentice** on a ship and spent four years learning how to sail before becoming a **Second Mate**. Four years later, in 1898, Ernest achieved the title of Master Mariner. This meant that he was able to sail a British ship anywhere in the world. Although Ernest travelled to places around the world, he never saw the Antarctic – something he was eager to do.

Expeditions

Ernest was appointed as third officer to the National Antarctic Expedition's ship, 'Discovery'. This was to be a voyage of scientific and geographical discovery, led by the explorer Robert Falcon Scott, and would be Ernest's first expedition to the Antarctic. The team set sail on 31st July 1901, arriving at the Antarctic Coast over five months later on 8th January 1902.

With Scott and one other team member, Ernest trekked towards the South Pole in extremely difficult conditions, getting closer to the Pole than anyone had come before. Unfortunately, the team experienced many hardships during the expedition, including snow blindness, frostbite and **scurvy**. Due to becoming very



poorly, Ernest was sent home early on 4th January 1903, never having reached the South Pole.

Back in Britain, Ernest spent some time as a journalist before he attempted his second Antarctic expedition and set sail aboard a ship named 'Nimrod' on 1st January 1908.

On this expedition, Ernest and his team discovered the Beardmore Glacier, climbed Mount Erebus – the second-highest volcano in Antarctica – and came even closer to the South Pole than they had before (reaching a point only 180 km from the Pole). Their return journey was a race against time and

they arrived at Hut Point just in time to catch the ship.

On Ernest's return home, he received an award from King Edward VII and a few months later, the King made him a knight – so he became Sir Ernest Shackleton.

Determined to go on another expedition, Ernest put an advertisement in the newspaper asking for men to join him; more than 5,000 people applied and in 1914, Ernest selected a crew of 56 men, who were split between two ships named 'Endurance' and 'Aurora', which set sail on 8th August.

Conditions in the Weddell Sea were slow and hazardous and on 19th January 1915, the ship 'Endurance' became stuck in a large **ice floe**. Ernest and his crew abandoned the ship (which eventually sank ten months later) and lived on top of the Antarctic ice for almost two years before they were finally rescued on 30th August 1916.

Glossary

apprentice: A beginner who is learning a trade.

governess: A woman employed to teach children in their homes.

ice floe: A sheet of floating ice.

merchant navy: The ships which transport produce to and from a country.

scurvy: A disease caused by a lack of vitamin C.

Second Mate: An assistant on a merchant ship.

Questions

1. How old was Ernest when his family moved to Sydenham? Tick one.

- ☐ four
☐ six
☐ ten
☐ eleven

2. Order the following statements from 1-5 to show the order they happened.

	Ernest's ship 'Endurance' became stuck in a large ice floe.
	Ernest joined the merchant navy.
	Ernest set sail aboard a ship named 'Nimrod'.
	Ernest achieved the title of Master Mariner.
	Ernest was appointed as third officer to the National Antarctic Expedition's ship, 'Discovery'.

3. Which other famous explorer was important in Ernest's life?

4. Fill in the missing words from this sentence:

Ernest advertised for men to join him on his expeditions and more than _____ people applied; in 1914, Ernest selected a crew of _____ men, who set sail on _____.

5. Find and copy a phrase from the text which shows that Ernest was keen to visit Antarctica.

6. Sum up Ernest's time in the merchant navy.

7. Why do you think that Ernest went on multiple Antarctic expeditions?

8. How is Ernest similar to another famous explorer or scientist?

9. Why did lots of the crew get scurvy?

Answers

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Robert Falcon Scott

4. Fill in the missing words from this sentence:

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5. Find and copy a phrase from the text which shows that Ernest was keen to visit Antarctica.

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6. Sum up Ernest's time in the merchant navy.

Pupils' own responses, such as: After joining the merchant navy at 16, Ernest became an apprentice; he spent four years learning how to sail before becoming a Second Mate and, after four more years, becoming Master Mariner (so he could sail British ships around the world).

7. Why do you think that Ernest went on multiple Antarctic expeditions?

Pupils' own responses, such as: He had always wanted to explore the Antarctic and loved adventures so he kept going back for more exciting escapades; he was striving to reach the South Pole.

8. How is Ernest similar to another famous explorer or scientist?

Pupils' own responses which compare Ernest to another famous explorer or scientist, such as Scott or Amundsen.

9. Why did lots of the crew get scurvy?

Pupils' own responses, such as: Scurvy is a disease caused by a lack of vitamin C, which we get from fruit and vegetables, so many of the crew got ill with scurvy because they were at sea for a long time so had limited fresh food.