

A British expedition dares to recreate Scott's last journey to the South Pole. Sid Smith asks why they want a QL.



Pole-star QL on Southern Quest

A BRITISH team is planning a year in the Antarctic and the first walk to the South Pole since Scott's 1912 expedition — and is taking a QL.

The five Britons are about to set off on one of the world's worst journeys. They will camp on the Antarctic ice for at least a year in temperatures down to -60 Centigrade, and then two of their number will attempt to walk almost 900 miles to the South Pole, pulling all their supplies behind them on specially designed man sledges.

Throughout their stay, a Sinclair QL will be solely responsible for the management of scientific data, for the production of a book about the expedition, and for the logging of day-to-day radio contact with the two men on their solitary, 85-day journey.

"We chose the QL because it was much the most exciting computer available," says expedition manager William Fenton. "Because it was small, because it was powerful for its size, and because we thought we'd take something adventurous. And because we liked Clive Sinclair."

Their expedition, *In the Footsteps of Scott*, grew from a desire to retrace the



historic journey of Robert Scott to the South Pole seventy years ago.

However, the five men have no desire to repeat the ultimately fatal outcome of that earlier trip, and are counting on the best of modern technology — including the QL — to see them through.

"The difficulties of walking 900 miles across the Antarctic are almost insurmountable," says Mike Stroud, the expedition doctor who will be using the QL more than anyone else. "It's only by sticking to a most rigid diet, in the form of calories per ounce, and by using the strongest and lightest modern materials for the equipment, that the men can hope to get through."

Their acquisition of the Sinclair device is only part of the £750,000 worth of sponsorship they have already managed to raise. Products as diverse as Shell oil and Bernard Mathew's turkey breast rolls have been supplied as a result of the highly professional marketing of the expedition, and are now in a warehouse packed with equipment in London's West India Dock.

"Everything here has been given to us," says Dr Stroud, waving an arm over mountains of low-temperature clothing and two years' supply of food. "We started out with nothing. Now we've a ship and all these stores and it's all come from letters and phone calls, and gradually increasing credibility."

In return, the expedition has been able to offer their sponsors the benefit of the most rigorous field testing which any product could ever wish for, and a huge amount of highly desirable free publicity.

"We had a major press conference here a couple of weeks ago, with six TV channels and about fifty newspapers

from all over the world. We've had Princess Anne down here on the ship, and we've been on *News at Ten* three or four times."

What about the QL? The expedition members are already making plans for spin-offs they can market after they come home. Apart from a film of their epic journey and an exclusive two year contract with *News at Ten*, they have also acquired a £50,000 advance from publisher Jonathan Cape for a book about the expedition. That book will be written on the Sinclair QL.

"Unfortunately," says Dr Stroud, "none of us have a clue about computers at the moment. But we're counting on the QL being easy to pick up and use, even for a beginner."

The machine will stay in the expedition's base camp and therefore will not be exposed to the hazards of sub-zero temperatures and 100 mph winds.

Dr Stroud explains the scientific uses he plans for the computer. "I have a whole series of observations to perform on the effect of Antarctic conditions on the human physiology.

"Obviously, I'll be looking at the changes which take place as a result of low temperatures, but I also want to examine the way the human metabolic rate adapts to changes in the amount of daylight. As the Antarctic day changes between perpetual day and perpetual night, I'll be using the QL to record and manipulate data about alterations in body temperature, in food intake and in sleeping patterns."

Many of those alterations will depend on the effects of the special food and clothing which the expedition will be taking, particularly for the two-man push to the South Pole.

"We've learned a lot from the records kept by members of the disastrous Scott expedition. One of the worst tortures they faced was the way in which perspiration from their bodies passed into their clothing and sleeping bags and then froze, so that they were eventually

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Scott Expedition

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carrying many pounds of ice, locked inside the goose down which was intended to protect them."

The expedition hopes to get round that problem through the use of a vapour barrier inside their insulated suits and sleeping bags. Most of the body's moisture will be trapped next to the skin by this barrier, thereby preventing the build-up of ice in their clothing, and helping to prevent dehydration in the arid Antarctic air.

"We'll probably get a bit sweaty," says Dr Stroud, "but that's certainly better than the alternative."

Dr Stroud won't be one of the two men pulling sledges to the South Pole. That dubious pleasure is reserved for Robert Swan and Roger Mead, who between them have clocked up an impressive list of qualifications for the job — things like solo bicycle rides from Cape Town to Cairo, the circumnavigation of the Icelandic ice-cap, and a winter ascent of the north face of the Eiger.

Unlike Captain Scott, they will not have the help of ponies and tractors for any stage of their journey; nor will they be able to rely on periodic stops at pre-arranged supply dumps. Instead, they will make the entire 883 mile journey

from base camp to the Pole on their own two feet, pulling behind them two sledges containing every ounce of their supplies.

They will also be uncomfortably aware that since Scott's time, nobody has attempted a walk to the South Pole, and that not one of the Scott party got back alive.

"No, we've got no desire to imitate the Scott expedition too closely," says a member of the present enterprise with a smile. "We've all heard the story of their last days and of Captain Oates who walked off into the snow rather than slow up the expedition."

Nevertheless, their awareness of the tragic precedent for their walk to the Pole is very apparent to an outsider; constant references are made to the superiority of their equipment over that of the 1912 party, and in the galley of the expedition's ship some mordant wit has deliberately mis-spelt the label on their porridge container. "OATES" is what it says.

Even the presence of a Sinclair computer on board owes something to Captain Scott. "Dundee was the big connection here," says William Fenton. "Scott bought his ship there, and we found out that many of the parts for the Sinclair machine are made in Dundee.

So we had to get a QL."

The long walk of the two modern explorers will differ from that of Scott and his party in one large way and in a number of small ones.

The large difference is that, unlike Scott and his party, they won't have to walk back. Instead, a ski plane will fly to the South Pole and collect them for the return trip to base.

"For a large part of Scott's walk he was floundering along, sinking to his knees in snow. He did have skis, but they were primitive things which kept falling apart. On our walk to the Pole, though, we'll have the best modern composite skis."

As an insurance policy, each of the two sledges will have enough supplies for both men — in case one of the sledges is lost.

The five men of the expedition will be camped on the Antarctic for a year, much of that time spent isolated from any outside contact. What will they do if their QL breaks down?

"We'll be scuppered," says Dr Stroud.

"No, it won't be as bad as that," laughs William Fenton, "We'll be able to manage by keeping written notes and by using a calculator. We'd certainly be disappointed, though."

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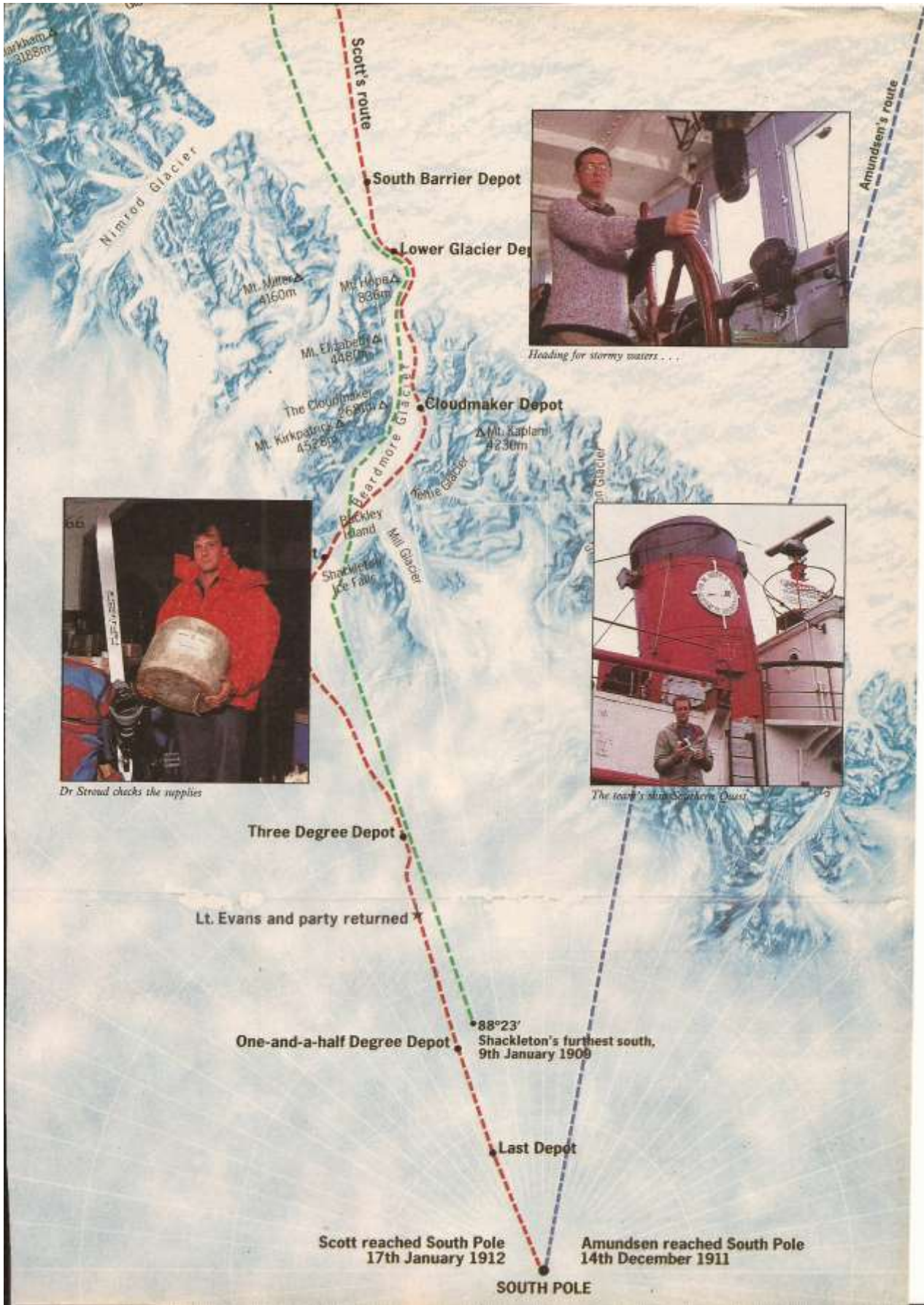
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PRISM



Scott's route

Amundsen's route



Heading for stormy waters...



Dr Stroud checks the supplies



The team's ship Southern Queen

South Barrier Depot

Lower Glacier Depot

Cloudmaker Depot

Three Degree Depot

Lt. Evans and party returned

One-and-a-half Degree Depot
88°23' Shackleton's furthest south, 9th January 1909

Last Depot

Scott reached South Pole
17th January 1912

Amundsen reached South Pole
14th December 1911

SOUTH POLE