The South Pole to be seen through Captain Scott’s eyes for the first time in a century

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The photographs taken by Captain Scott on his final expedition to the South Pole will be saved for the nation by the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) in Cambridge University thanks to the support of HLF enabling their purchase, exactly 100 years to the day since his expedition reached the South Pole.

This remarkable collection, consisting of 109 photographs, gives a view of the Antarctic as seen through Captain Scott’s eyes as he documented the first part of his epic journey to the South Pole. Subjects include his companions, the ponies and sledges, the scientific work they were undertaking and the breathtaking Antarctic landscape. For almost 70 years, these photographs were considered lost.

The photographs themselves were printed in the Antarctic by members of the expedition team as they waited for his return from the Pole, and Captain Scott was never to see the images he had taken.

Captain Scott was taught photography by the official expedition photographer, Herbert Ponting, and the collection charts his first attempts through to the remarkable images he captured on the first part of the Polar journey to the head of the Beardmore Glacier.

Thanks to a previous HLF award, the original 1,700 glass-plate negatives of Herbert Ponting’s photographs were bought by SPRI in 2004. The acquisition of Scott’s own photographs brings the two collections together for the first time, making this the largest photographic record of the British Antarctic Expedition 1910 – 1912.

The purchase of the photographs by SPRI will allow the images to be reunited with Scott's camera, which was given to the Institute by the late Lady Philippa Scott in 2008.

Once they have been fully conserved, the photographs will be digitised and made available online.

Professor Julian Dowdeswell, Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute, said: “Scott’s photographs bring to life, in vivid detail, his party’s sledging journey into the interior of Antarctica. From men and ponies struggling through deep snow, to panoramas of the Transantarctic Mountains, the images are very powerful. They are a superb complement to the Antarctic photographs of Herbert Ponting, which the Heritage Lottery Fund also helped us to acquire.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: “This stunning collection provides a fascinating insight into Captain Scott’s ill-fated Antarctic expedition. Although he was never to return, the research and records that were undertaken by his team are of historic and scientific importance. We at the Heritage Lottery Fund are delighted to play a part in bringing these photographs to the Scott Polar Research Institute where they will be conserved and made available for everyone to see.”

The British Antarctic (Terra Nova) Expedition was led by Captain Robert Falcon Scott RN with the twin objectives of being the first to reach the geographical South Pole and to undertake scientific research on the Antarctic environment.

Scott and four companions attained the pole on 17 January 1912, to find that a Norwegian team led by Roald Amundsen had preceded them by 34 days. Scott's entire party died on the return journey from the pole. Some of their bodies, journals, and personal effects were discovered by a search party eight months later.

Captain Scott’s photographs were developed in the Antarctic by the geologist, Frank Debenham, who later became the founding Director of SPRI. The images were returned to the UK by members of the expedition in 1913 and it was intended that they be used to illustrate books, reports and lectures; however, difficulties with establishing copyright meant that only a handful were ever used.

The First World War intervened and confusion over ownership was never resolved, any remaining negatives were lost and the prints passed to Herbert Ponting. On Ponting's death in 1935, the prints were sold to the photographic agency Popperfoto, who in turn sold them at auction in New York in 2001 and they have remained in private hands ever since.

The images were recently published in a book entitled *The Lost Photographs of Captain Scott* by David Wilson, great-nephew of Edward Wilson who died with Scott.

Notes to editors

Scott Polar Research Institute
Alongside the acquisition of Scott’s Photographs and the Herbert Ponting Archive, HLF funded the dramatic transformation of the Polar Museum at the Scott Polar Research Institute, enabling the museum to reinterpret and redisplay the history of polar exploration and the modern scientific significance of the Arctic and Antarctic in the context of our changing climate. The museum was reopened in June 2010.

Further information

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