

FRANK
WORSLEY
SHACKLETON'S FEARLESS CAPTAIN

JOHN THOMSON

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PREFACE

Ten years ago I was asked to join a lecture team on a small passenger vessel for a six-week summer cruise to Antarctica from South America – an irresistible prospect. What made it more thrilling was that the route would take us across the daunting waters of the Southern Ocean that spills around Elephant Island, the precarious ‘rock’ that sheltered most of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s *Endurance* crew in 1916. It was from Elephant Island that Captain Frank Worsley navigated the lifeboat, the *James Caird*, 800 miles to South Georgia, with only a compass and four hazy sightings of the sun.

The invitation to sail six times south of Cape Horn, across Drake Strait – the treacherous passage between South America and the Antarctic Peninsula – presented the chance to experience, more vividly, the *James Caird*’s voyage, rated by many as the greatest small-boat sailing feat. Yet it took a storm of hurricane proportions to really bring it home to me. Of our six crossings, two were enlivened by atrocious weather, one of which closed down all activities on board, in the face of waves measuring up to 50 feet and wind gusts of 180 kilometres an hour, which is a snorter of Force 15 (out of 17) on the extended Beaufort wind scale. The captain advised everyone to remain in their cabins, and if one had to go out to ‘HANG ON!’

I watched the ship riding out the extreme weather on the in-cabin video and occasionally from a porthole. Through the spray, I witnessed menacing monster waves, white with foam. I tried to imagine what it must have been like on the *James Caird*. If storms of this magnitude were common in summer, as we were, what must it have been like for the *James Caird*, which made its voyage months later, when the weather was so cold that ice froze the oars and weighed the boat down? Not only that, I was on a 20,000-ton ship, a small vessel by modern cruising standards, but the *James Caird* was a 22-foot lifeboat, with only a canvas cover for shelter and makeshift sails for propulsion.

My interest in Commander Frank Arthur Worsley is enduring. I first heard his name when I was preparing newspaper articles to mark the fiftieth

Frank Worsley, master of the *Endurance* on the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (Weddell Sea Party), 1914–1916. SCOTT POLAR RESEARCH INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

anniversary of New Zealand's part in the battles of Greece and Crete in World War II. One man who helped me was Arthur Helm, of Wellington, a veteran of those events and also exceptionally knowledgeable on polar history and some of its characters. In the course of our work he mentioned Worsley, and I was determined that I would write about his life. A few years after my meeting with Helm, the opportunity to research and write a biography on Worsley loomed and was gratefully accepted. Around this time, the same challenge was being recognised by Wendy Dunlop, a talented writer, with associations both to Akaroa, where Worsley was born, and Christchurch, where he lived until embarking on his seagoing career. Dunlop was first into print with an article about Worsley in *New Zealand Geographic* magazine (No. 28, 1995), beautifully illustrated with a series of paintings from an American artist, Arthur Shilstone.

Retirement gave me the time, and in the next few years I travelled twice to England to research Worsley and his life of adventure. In the village of Claygate, in Surrey, I met Patrick St John Bamford, son of Eric Bamford, Worsley's close friend, and where Worsley and his wife Jean were regular guests. Both Worsleys, Frank and Jean – 35 years apart – died in the Bamford home, and Pat became executor for the estates, allowing me access to the many records of Frank Worsley's life, and the letters between Frank and Jean Worsley, as well as her diaries, many photographs, and other papers: it was the veritable treasure in the attic, and much of it was unread. He also directed me to the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) at Cambridge University, where Jean Worsley had deposited more records after her husband's death. The result was *Shackleton's Captain*, now out of print for many years, but the publication in 1998 had elicited global interest, and over the years people have contacted me with stories about 'Wuz', making it essential that an upgraded edition with additional information be published.

When I subsequently met Wendy Dunlop, we collaborated on the idea of 'bringing Frank Worsley home' to Akaroa. Pat Bamford had generously decided that much of what he had in his home actually belonged in New Zealand, if not at SPRI, and he and I sorted through the trove, delivering one consignment to SPRI, and the other to be deposited at both Akaroa and Canterbury museums.

The Akaroa Museum staff, led by Lynda Wallace, and the enthusiastic and active Friends group, invested much time and effort displaying the memorabilia into an outstanding exhibition, *Salute to Adventure*, created with respect by museum designer Chris Currie. It is a sincere tribute to a man whose life was much more than miraculous survival in a succession of extraordinary adventures. Frank Worsley was a writer with deep feeling, an artist with a keen eye for detail, a raconteur with a wicked sense of humour, and always a proud New Zealander.

The next initiative from this group, wishing to celebrate the life of one of their sons, resulted in an artwork: an impressive bust of Worsley, sculpted

by the Christchurch artist Stephen Gleeson. And there was another link to this. Years earlier Arthur Helm had shown me his collection of rocks brought back from the Antarctic as ship ballast at the end of Fuchs' Trans-Antarctic Expedition in the 1950s. They were now sinking ever so slowly into the ground at his Wellington home. Arthur had died some time before the Worsley sculpture project, and his wife, Jennie, was about to sell the property and move south. She agreed that the rocks could be extracted. The Akaroa connection got to work, and the genuine Antarctic rocks are today the plinth for Worsley's bust on the Akaroa waterfront, and somewhat typically, the site is exposed to the southerlies direct from the Antarctic zone, where Worsley had many of his finest moments. The bust presents the great seaman facing the elements as he did in countless oceans and seas around the world. It was unveiled on a suitably cold and windy 6 March 2004.

This book has been a rewarding adventure of my own to be reacquainted with Frank Worsley. Being on the mighty Southern Ocean 10 years ago was a highlight because I felt closer to him at the site of one of his finest moments. It also reminded me that more than 160 years ago, Worsley's grandfather led his small tribe of Worsleys and sailed the Southern Ocean in another life-shaping voyage lasting 16 weeks to start a new life in a young colony called New Zealand.

CHAPTER I THE FAMILY

The Worsley family arrived in New Zealand a year later than the Canterbury Pilgrims, those settlers who landed from the first four ships late in 1850 to become part of the colonial aristocracy of Canterbury province. Henry Francis Worsley was the head of the family, a gentleman described by his grandson Frank Worsley as having ‘the air of a prince but no business instincts’. Henry Francis sold his property in Rugby, England, and sailed for New Zealand in the bark *Cornwall*, arriving at Port Cooper, now Lyttelton, in December 1851, after a journey of 116 days. Henry Francis took with him his second wife and a total of 11 children, ‘three brands of step-sisters and step-brothers,’ Frank Worsley later wrote.

There are many branches of the Worsley family in England, mainly in the north. The acknowledged seat is at the village of Hovingham, North Yorkshire. But before the Worsleys bought the manor of Hovingham, near Malton, in 1563, records show the family came from that of a French baron, Elizeus De Workesley, who seized what is today Worsley, a suburb of Manchester, during the Norman Conquest. This was achieved probably in the period around 1069, when the north of England was ravaged by the French invaders. Years later the Anglo-Norman baron was an enthusiast for the First Crusade to free Jerusalem from Islam, during which he was killed and was buried on the Greek island of Rhodes.

At Hovingham, Thomas Worsley designed and built the hall and he became a close friend of King George III: horses were one of his passions and he is said to have taught the king to ride. His son William became a baronet with hereditary rights, the title going to the eldest son, also William, one of whose brothers was Henry Francis Worsley, the Canterbury settler and grandfather of Frank Worsley. Another Hovingham link is the present Duchess of Kent, who, as Katherine Worsley, married into the British royal family at York in 1961. She is related to Sir Marcus Worsley, the present holder of the hereditary title. He lives on the Hovingham estate.

The family’s love for horses was inherited by Henry Francis Worsley

who, along with his families and furniture, brought to New Zealand two thoroughbred racing horses. And he appears to have earned Frank Worsley’s assessment of him not being very successful in business. He is, however, remembered as an early committee member of the Canterbury Jockey Club; he was a judge at early race meetings at Hagley Park, Christchurch, from Anniversary Day, 1853, and was on the sub-committee that drew up the original rules of the jockey club.

Canterbury province was to be the English (i.e. Church of England) settlement of New Zealand, as Otago province was already established as the Presbyterian. Development of land outside the main centre of Christchurch was to be carefully organised, leading to establishment of what was deemed to become the best of English society, from church hierarchy and gentry to artisans and labourers.

Colonists with the financial means to have large estates were encouraged to buy land and become freeholders, while the yeomen would have small freehold farms. The high price of land was intended to ensure that those of small means did not become landowners too soon, and so would provide an adequate pool of farm labour. This protective and orderly approach was thwarted when land sold slowly and there was pressure for money to finance development. About this same time, the 1850s, there was a drought in Australia, which sent a number of land-hungry squatters to New Zealand. They encouraged the provincial government to relax its regulations and to accommodate the ‘new’ money; what was deemed to be waste land was opened in runs of 5 to 50,000 acres. In the scramble that followed, most of the best land was leased cheaply in large blocks. By 1855, to claim a run, a man had only to apply at a land office, binding himself to stock the run within six months, with one sheep for every 20 acres, or one head of cattle for each 120 acres.

H.F. Worsley applied to the Canterbury Association for a land allocation and according to Canterbury Museum records he got 50 acres in the main loop of the Avon River at Fendalton, with a river boundary on three sides. Frank Worsley spoke of a 1-acre block, claiming that it had developed to become Cathedral Square in the city centre. Writing in 1938, he regretted not owning it: the land had been sold 70 years earlier; but in any case he, too, had recognised he had neither a sense of business nor the ability to accumulate wealth.

Henry Worsley bought Run 134, 5000 acres situated over the Rakaia River, in 1854. A neighbour was William Browning Tosswill (Run 134a); they formed a partnership and worked their runs together as a dairy farm, which they called Waihora. Local records show that Worsley was prosecuted several times for allowing cattle to stray, and that he and Tosswill dissolved the partnership after a year. Both runs were later sold or were abandoned and became part of Broadlands Station.

These were exciting days for young colonials, and H.F. Worsley’s eldest



Frank Worsley's father, Henry Theophilus Worsley, at Akaroa in the 1880s. BAMFORD FAMILY

son, Henry Theophilus, aged 17 when the family migrated, revelled in the environment that offered so much adventure. Some of the earliest settlers who stocked land with cattle later abandoned the properties and the stock. The cattle turned wild, and this offered the chance for bold young men to make quick money by rounding them up for sale in Christchurch.

In 1854, Henry Worsley, at 21, led a party of five youths, two of them his younger brothers, in expeditions into the high country at the foothills of the Southern Alps to find wild cattle. Frank Worsley was later to record that the five partners camped at the junction of three rivers, and called the area Mesopotamia, after the region of Asia between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The youngsters would certainly have been given ancient history lessons during long winter days, so the significance of the shape of the junction would not be lost on the cowboys. A few years later, in 1860, Samuel Butler, the English novelist and philosopher, whose mother was a Fanny Worsley from Bristol, migrated to New Zealand and settled in that same Canterbury high country. He successfully applied for thousands of acres of the unclaimed land where the Worsley boys from Akaroa had camped on their cattle round-ups.

Butler and the Canterbury Worsleys appear to have been related by marriage, though this is not acknowledged in any Butler manuscript, or by Frank

Worsley. However, Henry Francis Worsley had a cousin, Philip Worsley, whose wife may have been Butler's aunt: in September 1861, Butler reflected on his good life in New Zealand in a letter to his aunt, Mrs Philip Worsley. The possibility of a link between Butler and the New Zealand Worsleys is tantalising. The name of his leasehold run, Mesopotamia, is generally credited to Butler; perhaps he simply adopted the title already given the area by his kin, the Worsley cowboys.

Before the Butler tenure, the wild colonial boys made several trips into the hills. It was a dangerous but rewarding life: after one especially good round-up, each of the partners received £400. And on one search for more wild cattle, Henry Worsley discovered a pass in the Southern Alps mountain chain, which still carries his name. The last venture of the partners ended in tragedy, however. The round-up went well, to the point where the disturbed cattle were being driven off the hills and onto the plain for the final drive to Christchurch. A large bull broke back and Arthur Worsley, the youngest in the family, rode after it. The bull turned suddenly and charged. Arthur's horse stopped in fright and the bull tossed horse and rider. Arthur was killed outright.

Henry Worsley and his brother Charles settled down to a saner, calmer lifestyle, and in the same church on the same day, they married the Fulton sisters, Georgina and Fanny. Henry and Georgina took over a run at Grehan Valley, on hills high above Akaroa township on the edge of the harbour on Banks Peninsula, where the land had to be cleared of native bush before it could be made productive. Frank Worsley was born at Akaroa on 22 February 1872. He was the third and last of the three children who survived beyond infancy, and he was the second son of the family, coming four years after his brother, Harry, and two years after his sister, Helen.

Henry Francis Worsley did not remain in New Zealand. It is not clear when and why he returned to England, but he died at Hovingham Lodge in 1876. He left his considerable property equally to his two surviving sons, Charles and Henry Theophilus. It was a sound estate, comprising ten houses in Rugby, his interest valued at several thousand pounds sterling in another property, his life insurance worth £1000, plus his house and land at Hovingham Lodge, another farm of 160 acres, and shares and household goods. The lodge is part of the Hovingham Hall estate which was then occupied by Henry Francis' brother, Sir William Worsley.

Frank Arthur Worsley at the age of 8. BAMFORD FAMILY



The hardships of bush colonial life took a toll on Georgina Worsley, and after 10 years of marriage she died. She was buried at Akaroa, where her grave has been restored. Henry boarded Frank and Helen at what Frank Worsley later called 'an old maid's school'. But this arrangement did not last, apparently because the 'old maid' set her cap at the widower, who took fright and removed the children from her care. Frank was then sent with Harry to Harlock's Academy, a boarding school in Akaroa. It was a place of study in name only, according to the reminiscences of Pat Keegan, who attended with his brother Fred at the same time as Harry and Frank Worsley. Keegan wrote that he was 'packed off' to the private school for boys run by A.K. Harlock, BA, when he was aged five. The Keegan boys were among the smallest boys at the school; 'Frank Worsley came next.'

The schooling at Harlock's had to be paid for. It was considered *infra dig* to go to the government school, which was free. Another difference was that at Harlock's the boys had to wear boots. But for all its pretensions, Harlock's was a poor establishment, and Harlock was often half drunk and used his cane freely. 'No doubt it was often deserved, but when he had been drinking he was extra severe.' After he thrashed a boy particularly badly, one of the larger pupils attacked him and knocked him down. Subsequently, there was not much discipline, and a year later the school closed. Keegan said he didn't learn much at the school that was of any use: 'I didn't even learn to swear!' Like the other boys at Akaroa and the surrounding farms, he already knew all the words from listening to the bullock-drivers who brought loads of timber from the hills to the port.

The life of young Frank Worsley could have ended at the age of six. He drank some carbolic acid from a bottle he found in the yard of the family's home. The incident was featured in the *Akaroa Mail*, 17 September 1878, describing how, having consumed the acid, he staggered and fell, but was given an emetic and seemed much better. But during the evening he became worse, and was so ill that a Dr Guthrie had to be sent for 'no less than three times'. The proper remedies having been administered, he was perfectly well the next day, 'and still, we are glad to say, remains so'.

Adventure, either presenting itself or having to be searched for, was a major part of growing up in the colony, and Harry and Frank Worsley were keen players. One day, at the ages of twelve and eight, they took a day off school to visit their father working in bush, high in the hills. Frank by then was on the roll of French Farm Public School: he is listed as a pupil during 1881 and 1882. After tramping around the coast, they climbed part of the crater of Banks Peninsula, into thick mist, and finally to where their father was working. The boys were soon taken back to the school, Frank riding with his father, while Harry trotted alongside clinging to the stirrup leather. The tough little boys had walked and climbed about 23 miles: they got a caning for their trouble.

The Worsley boys spent all their holidays with their father, who was

clearing his land and selling the timber for firewood. It was a hard, exciting life in the open air, inculcating the pleasures of adventure into young minds. Every opportunity to experience something new was taken. Harry, on one occasion, was given half a crown to take a horse 9 miles to a farm at the head of the bay. Frank went with him, and later, instead of walking back, they went along the other side of the harbour to Wainui, opposite Akaroa, and decided to cross the 3-mile-wide harbour on a raft they built from flax stems. They used their jackets for sails, made a couple of rough paddles, and set off as the sun was disappearing. Halfway across the harbour the wind came up and the sea started washing through the raft. Spray was breaking over them. 'Wet through, we paddled hard to keep warm,' Frank Worsley wrote. When it became dark, they steered for the lights of Akaroa, finally landing on rocks at St John's Peninsula. As they made their way up the hill to the family property, a horseman appeared through the dark: their father. Frank was shaken and put in the saddle with his father. Harry got a brief, sharp hiding, grabbed the stirrup and hung on all the way home.

When Henry took up a bush-felling contract on another run, at Peraki, the nearest school was 8 miles away and over hills that were often deep in snow during winter. So Henry taught the boys himself, and Frank Worsley recorded that they learned the Greek alphabet, Latin roots and verses of dog-Latin. Henry also sternly checked any tendency to speak with a colonial twang, and infused in the boys his own love of fair play and distaste for lies.

Frank was small, but the hard physical life he was leading toughened his wiry frame and helped him develop a hardy constitution. His toughness was to become legendary. At the age of 10 he had his own small axe and he often worked beside his father and the hired tree-fellers, the 'bush-whackers', who cleared the land for the growing of cocksfoot, the most prized grass seed in the young colony. Years later, when writing *First Voyage*, Worsley regretted the deforestation:

It was a mad waste. The colonists in their greed for more grass seed and sheep pasture burned millions of pounds worth of timber. They recklessly destroyed the wonderful beauty of the bush, baring the soil until it was carried away by landslides, and lowered the rainfall and laid waste the homes of countless sweet songsters.

But at the time:

I loved the axe-work and the sweet scent of wood-chips ... I shouted with joy and pride in my puny strength as the chips flew outward at the axe's ringing blows and the swishing branches overhead swept to destruction, carrying away another feathered songster's home and family, adding another space to the blue sky where formerly all had been green and leafy loveliness. Poor young vandal! I knew no better.

When the weather was bad the two boys, 'in rags between poverty and tree-climbing', sat with the men as they yarned and smoked, listening to tales of

earlier colonial times; of England – ‘our home that we had never seen’; of old Rugby School days where Henry had studied under the famed Dr Arnold, of school fights, fox-hunting, London theatres and ‘gals’. Anglomania was easily absorbed by these boys from an early age: it remained with Frank Worsley all his life.

Harry’s lust for adventure beyond the colony turned him towards the sea, and he persuaded his father to apprentice him to the New Zealand Shipping Company. He was 15 years old. Harry sailed in the wool clipper *Waitara* (833 tons) for England, where he enthusiastically reported meetings with new cousins and other relatives. But five days out, when sailing back to New Zealand, the *Waitara* sank in a collision with another New Zealand Shipping Company clipper, the 1012-ton *Hurunui*. The two ships had left London on the same day in 1883 and were beating down the English Channel when they collided. *Waitara*’s second mate, when on a port tack, had failed to keep his ship clear. Harry was one of 16 survivors; 20 others, including the second mate, drowned.

About this time, Henry Worsley decided to remarry and the family moved from Peraki to Fendalton, Christchurch, presenting Helen and Frank with the prospect of a more civilised life. Frank, a decidedly wild bush boy, was sent to Fendalton School to have his rough edges honed under the guidance of the headmaster, Samuel Bullock. Frank recorded that he found civilised life ‘very irksome, and I consistently raised hell to vary the monotony, which must have been a sore trial.’ Bullock, who ‘lightheartedly undertook the task of educating me’ found himself caning young Worsley every day – ‘Saturdays, Sundays and holidays excepted’ as he tried to tame the youngster. There seemed to be no malice in this physical confrontation: Bullock was known to be a good and caring man, and a dedicated teacher. But Frank later estimated that in four years, between the ages of 11 and 15, Bullock must have administered about 3000 cuts of his cane to the palms of Frank Worsley’s hands. And in later years, Bullock would boast that Frank Worsley never cried, whimpered, tried to evade punishment or told him a lie.

Harry Worsley returned to New Zealand, but the drama of the channel collision and his experience and swim for life affected his health, and he gave up the sea. Harry became something of a wanderer, working in Australia, the East Indies and the South Pacific before joining the New Zealand

Frank Worsley in the Fendalton School uniform, about 1887. BAMFORD FAMILY

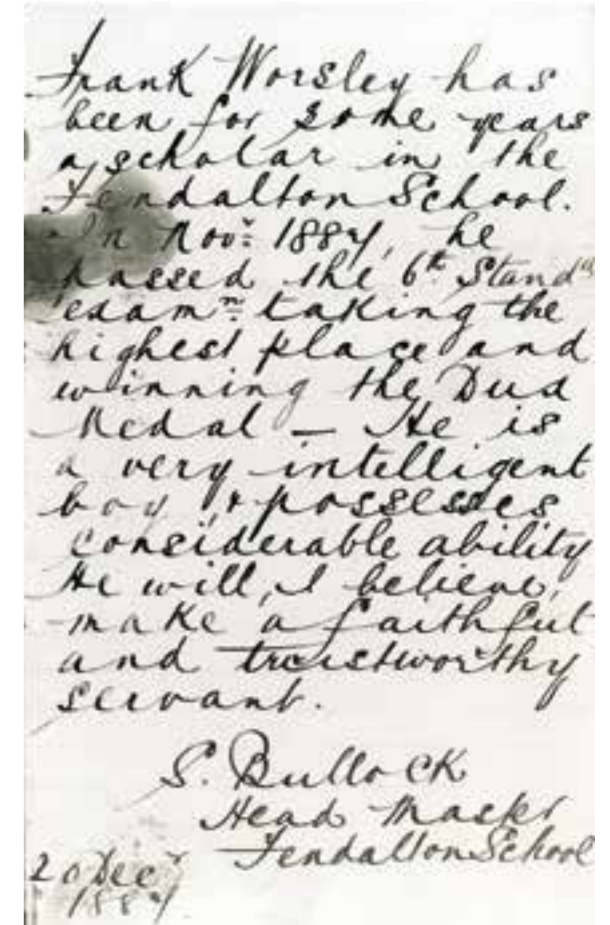


Army’s Second Contingent for service in South Africa in the Boer War. He survived to return to New Zealand. He never married and he settled in Northland for the remainder of his life.

Helen Worsley, when grown up, was sent to England to meet relatives and to finish her education. And at Fendalton School, Frank, to the delight of Samuel Bullock, started to settle down. He worked hard and came out near the top of each class until, at age 15, he won 12 prizes, the Dux Medal and was head boy of the school.

When Frank boldly stated that he too wanted to go to sea, the family raised no objections: the young man was clearly not destined for a desk job and he had an appetite for adventure best catered for in a disciplined environment. But when his father took Frank to the Christchurch office of the New Zealand Shipping Company the manager studied the small form before him, shook his head and said: ‘Too small. Give him six months to grow.’ Six months later, still diminutive, Frank was presented again and this time he was accepted. Indentures were arranged and signed before Mr Rose, the collector of Customs. Henry Worsley paid £50 as a premium and Frank became a ‘brass-bounder’, a junior midshipman or apprentice, on the 1057-ton *Wairoa* bound for London via Cape Horn, with a cargo of wool. The year was 1888.

Two years later, on the other side of the world, another young man started his seagoing career, also on a sailing ship, the *Hoghton Tower*. His name was Ernest Henry Shackleton.



Frank Worsley’s letter of recommendation from Fendalton School Headmaster Samuel Bullock. BAMFORD FAMILY

to the land invasion of the peninsula and the crippling campaign lasting nine months that so touched Worsley's fellow New Zealanders and their Australian comrades – the Anzacs.

Worsley was to stay with the naval reserve all his seagoing career, rising to the rank of lieutenant-commander in May 1914. But from time to time, he was called back for RNR duty. In 1911, for instance, he served for a month at sea on HMS *New Zealand*, the newly launched battle-cruiser gifted to Britain and the Royal Navy by the people of New Zealand.

Three months after he completed his service in *Swiftsure*, Worsley married for the first time. His bride was Theodora Blackden, of Tunbridge Wells, and the marriage was conducted on 20 December 1907. Worsley then went back to sea in the merchant service, with Allan Line Royal Mail Steamers, sailing across the North Atlantic, mainly to Canadian ports, often encountering testing icy conditions; and occasionally to South America. In London in the course of securing work, Worsley solicited from the high commissioner for New Zealand a letter of recommendation. This outlined his career with government vessels, starting as second officer and ending with his command of the *Countess of Ranfurly* – eight years' service. The letter added: 'The Prime Minister of New Zealand speaks of Lt. Worsley as a first class seaman and navigator.' And he continued to impress his new skippers, one of them Henry Blanchard, of the steamer *Sardiniare*, who stated in 1910, that 'he took great pleasure in certifying to the ability of Mr Frank Worsley'.

ON THE ICE WITH SHACKLETON

CHAPTER IV

In 1914 Worsley was on leave in London, between voyages, when he had a strange dream. It led to an extraordinary episode that changed Worsley's life. For Ernest Shackleton, it brought into his life a consistently loyal companion whose skills far outweighed his defects, and on whom the explorer's life and the lives of all the men in his party would depend, in the most dramatic stages of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914–16.

By this time Shackleton was the darling of the day in Britain for his attempt to become the first man to reach the South Pole, the journey that earned him his knighthood. After the excitement of Roald Amundsen's success ahead of Robert Scott in 1911, it seemed to many that there was nothing left in barren, cold Antarctica to explore. But Shackleton, who had failed by just 97 miles to reach the South Pole first, still thirsted to go south. He noted Amundsen's generous comment that, had Shackleton been able to start his attempt from Bay of Whales as originally planned, as the Norwegian had, Shackleton would have been first to the Pole.

Shackleton believed in himself, and he also believed that the fascination of the white continent, the existence of which had been confirmed only 100 years earlier, would ensure that there was more to discover. There remained the challenge of a trans-continental crossing, from sea to sea via the South Pole. He made that journey his next target. Shackleton set up the expedition's headquarters in London, at 4 New Burlington Street, interviewing some of the 5000 adventure seekers who hoped to join him – men of all ages, their enthusiasm whipped up by the popular press: Britain, after the disappointment of Scott's failure, was once more focusing on a polar undertaking of challenging substance.

For his ship, *Endurance*, Shackleton wanted John King Davis as captain, a very experienced skipper in the dangerous southern waters. He had been chief officer and later captain of the *Nimrod*, Shackleton's ship for his



be wise after the event.' A gale swept down on the ship and Shackleton had her shelter in the lee of a stranded iceberg until early on 18 January. Worsley took the *Endurance* under sail through a lane, with the engines stopped to prevent damage to the propellor, making 24 miles. Pack ice again forced the *Endurance* to the north-west until Shackleton decided to lie to for a while to see if the pack would open again with a change of wind.

Next morning, 19 January, at latitude 76°34' S, longitude 31°30' W, no progress could be made. The ice had closed around the ship during the night. No water could be seen in any direction from the deck. Next day it was clear that the ship was firmly beset: 'The ice was packed heavily and firmly all around the *Endurance* in every direction as far as the eye could reach from the masthead,' Shackleton recorded. The party was then about 60 miles from Vahsel Bay, but the ship would never see land again: this was her first voyage, and her last. The *Endurance* was in the grip of a force that would never release her. Worsley wrote: 'Strong north-easterly winds drove all the ice in that part of the Weddell Sea down to us and packed it solidly around the ship. In this manner we drifted off the coast during the remainder of January.'

Worsley said the temperature fell in January to 50° below zero, noting that this was supposed to be the height of summer. Later in the month Shackleton ordered one more big effort to move free. All hands were sent onto the floe with ice chisels, saws and picks. Steam was raised ready to drive the *Endurance* through the slightest hint of a path. They worked all day and most of the following day, the men cutting the young ice away before the bows with great energy. But still there was a barrier of about 400 yards of heavy ice separating the ship from what could have been a beckoning lead. 'The task was beyond our powers,' Shackleton wrote. He knew that without extracting his ship, there was no hope of crossing Antarctica this time. Worsley said, 'We all shared his disappointment. But he did not permit himself to display the regret that he felt, or to admit defeat, and he talked continually of making another attempt during the following year.'

By the end of the month, the brief Antarctic summer was officially over, but to Shackleton and his men it had hardly begun. Shackleton mused on what might have been: 'If I had guessed a month ago that the ice would grip us here, I would have established our base at one of the landing places at the great glacier [Glacier Bay].'

On 24 February the ship's routine was abandoned and the *Endurance* became a winter station, drifting slowly northwards away from the land. All hands were on duty during the day and, apart from the watchman, all could sleep at night. Worsley took a party onto the floe and started building a line of ice cairns and 'dogloos' around the ship. He also took a particular interest in recording soundings of the depth of the ocean, and in dredging up specimens for the biologist, Robert Clark. Worsley's report, *Biological, Soundings and Magnetic Record, Weddell Sea, 1914–1916*, is a meticulous daily recording of events other than ship's business that occurred on the journey

The *Endurance* tried to force her way through pack ice using sail, steam, and, on occasions, man-power. T.H. ORDE LEES COLLECTION, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON

from South Georgia, and then during the drift of the *Endurance* around the Weddell Sea. Among the entries are glimpses of Worsley's love of language, his keen eye and his deep fascination of the life around him:

26 September 1914, on the way to Buenos Aires: A young gentleman from Brazil flew aboard wearing a brilliant red waistcoat, bottom button fashionably undone, red epaulettes and white-yellow stripe on either side of his cap. Despite his gorgeous uniform, I believe he was some kind of starling.

15 January 1915: Clark secures a half specimen of an alepisauridae, allied to the mackerel. It has extraordinarily long sharp jaws and long thin teeth, slightly recurved, and is a very beautiful silvery colour all over.

9 May: Of the two kinds of seal we use for food up to this date, we infinitely prefer the crab-eater, as it appears to be a much cleaner and healthier animal than the Weddell seal. The latter is a very sluggish beast and many that we killed, besides smelling very high, are unhealthy looking and sometimes are positively diseased. These last we feed to the dogs: they appear to thrive quite well.

20 July: Killed four penguins and stomachs of three contained small stones and cuttle fish beaks, but were otherwise quite empty. The other had been fishing today, as live amphipods were found in his stomach, besides three interesting fishes, one of them unknown to Clark.

On 29 March, Orde Lees wrote: 'James, the physicist, had the task of tinkering with the still-developing wireless system of communication. Before leaving South Georgia, arrangements were made for the powerful station at the Falkland Islands to transmit a time signal and news on the first day of each month. James had established an aerial, but on three occasions no signals had been received.' With assistance from Greenstreet and Frank Hurley, James created a new aerial for another attempt to establish communication with the outside world on 1 April. It was an aptly named April Fools' Day because nothing was heard then, and no wireless contact was ever established.

Shackleton kept a careful eye on his men, watching for signs of distress. He was particularly keen on all getting plenty of fresh meat to fight off scurvy, and Worsley was one of those who enthusiastically took part in killing anything that could be trapped. Orde Lees' diary notes that on one dinner menu there appeared 'stewed clubbed seal à la Worsley.'

McNeish converted the interior of the ship into winter quarters as the dreary months descended and the *Endurance* gently edged further from land. The scientists and the sailors occupied the hold cubicles. Worsley, Wild, Marston and Crean lived in cubicles that McNeish established in the ward room, just above the hold, and Shackleton took sole occupancy of Worsley's cabin, which he had been sharing with his captain since the ship left Buenos Aires. When the new sleeping arrangements had been established, all meals were taken in the hold. Orde Lees described the ward room accommodation



The ship's artist, George Marston, leads dogs from the *Endurance* to the ice floe for exercise during the period when the ship was beset by ice. AMALGAMATED PRESS

as being divided into four cubicles that looked like little horse boxes, so were always alluded to as 'the stables'. He wrote, 'Marston has fixed up a sort of opium den settee about 4 feet by 4-1/2 feet which really occupies almost the entire available space ... he is by no means tall, which is lucky, and so he probably fits diagonally.'

The cubicles in the hold accommodated two men each, though the occupants of two of them – Hurley and Hussey, and doctors Macklin and McIlroy – took down their partition to create one large room, 12 feet by 7 feet, which Orde Lees said was called 'the Billabong' from words in 'an amusing song which Hurley often sings'. Cards were a popular pastime, and he also wrote of a poker school comprising Shackleton, Wild, Crean, McIlroy, Worsley and McNeish. For gambling chips, Shackleton dismantled a

walking stick made from hundreds of small whale bones threaded on an iron rod – a gift from South Georgia whalers.

Worsley once diverted his shipmates as winter was biting when he stripped and ran onto the snow naked and had a brief snow-bath, in a temperature of 29° F: probably the first voluntary skinny-dip in Antarctica. Worsley said that Crean was particularly shocked, thinking that the captain had ‘gone wrong in the napper’. Orde Lees described another curious sight during testing of the motor sledge on 29 and 30 April, for which he was responsible: ‘Sir Ernest and Captain Worsley accompanied the sledge and it was as much as they could do to keep up with it.’ During one breakdown, Shackleton and Worsley kept warm by dancing together on the floe. They performed a one-step while another of the party sang or whistled ‘The Policeman’s Holiday’. ‘It was most amusing and not a little incongruous to see the great polar explorer thus gyrating on the Antarctic ice. That is Sir Ernest all over. He is always able to keep his troubles under and show a bold front.’

On the first day of May the sun disappeared as midwinter approached. The month passed quietly. Worsley spent a lot of time aloft, taking sightings when he could, always peering into the horizon. Orde Lees recorded on 2 May: ‘Captain Worsley has wonderful eyesight. From the masthead he spied a seal about 3-1/2 miles away.’ In his diary for 7 June, he recorded how the captain, as night watchman the previous night, ‘somehow managed to let the temperature in the cubicles drop to 28° F, so he was not at all popular this morning. He said it was due to the strong south wind blowing down the hatches, and so on. We don’t think so.’ The drift of the *Endurance* continued quietly through June. McNeish wrote on 8 June: ‘We have drifted 12 miles nearer home and the Lord be thanked for that much, as I am about sick of the whole thing.’ He noted also that Hurley had been taking some flashlight pictures. The best of these became the most famous photographs ever taken on the ice.

Midwinter came on 22 June and was celebrated with the best dinner the cook could provide and with speeches, songs and toasts. The Antarctic Derby dog-sledge races were held. Worsley was judge, and while Wild’s team won the race, he awarded the honours to Hurley’s team because Wild failed to weigh in correctly: Shackleton, on Wild’s sledge, had fallen off 50 yards short of the finishing post.

In early July the sun started to reappear and some sounds of pressure on the trapped ship were heard. A huge blizzard swept in and temperatures dropped as low as minus 33.5° F. When the weather cleared, the nature of the surrounding ice pack had changed. Masses of ice thrown up by pressure could be seen in all directions. There were distant rumblings, with the areas of disturbance approaching the *Endurance*. Shackleton, Worsley and Wild resumed night watches because the ship was being shaken by heavy bumps from the pressure wave. Shackleton wrote: ‘Our long months of rest and safety seemed to be at an end.’ Next day he ordered stores of sledging



One of Frank Hurley’s most celebrated photographs of the *Endurance*. This mid-winter shot of the ship trapped in ice was taken by illuminating the scene with lamps. T.H. ORDE LEES COLLECTION, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON

provisions and other essentials to be placed handy for any sudden emergency. The pressure would return. The triumvirate of Shackleton, Wild and Worsley met on 13 July in Shackleton's cabin, and Shackleton told Worsley that he was going to lose his ship. Outside, the blizzard was still howling. Worsley asked, 'You seriously mean to tell me that the ship is doomed?' He said Shackleton knew 'far better than I: he had been in the Antarctic ice-fields before. I had not.' Shackleton knew that the expedition was coming to a new level of crisis. He told Worsley, 'The ship can't live in this, Skipper. You had better make up your mind that it is only a matter of time ... what the ice gets, the ice keeps.'

Worsley recorded that the days and nights which followed 'were the most trying, perhaps, that I have ever lived through ... there was nothing that I, the ship's commander, could do to save the ship. I had to stand passively by as she drifted to meet her doom.' The party was by then 400 miles from the Antarctic continent and 1000 miles from South Georgia, in the centre of the Weddell Sea, in abysmal conditions. The currents and the winds piled ice up on the land, throwing back more ice on the *Endurance*, despite the distance. There was no room for it all.

At their next conference, the three men discussed preparations for what might follow abandoning the *Endurance*. 'The men seemed to know that the game was up,' Worsley wrote. The blizzards were never-ending and the ice floes 'seemed to be fighting each other, hurling against one another and uniting only to use their mighty force to attack the poor little *Endurance*.' The next scare was on 1 August, when during lunch there was a noise 'as of 1000 guns going off' and the ship was squeezed up and out of the ice, onto her side. 'We slithered on to the wall of the dining saloon,' Worsley wrote. The ship gradually righted herself. The rest of August was comparatively uneventful. Another wave of pressure came with September, and all through that month the *Endurance* suffered in the unstable ice and began to leak badly.

The time came when the crew had to pump continuously for 72 hours without sleep, with the main engine running, in an effort to get her dry. But the water gained, and a coffer dam had to be built across her hold to confine the water to the stern. Coal was starting to block the pumps; Worsley led a team that sweated in the hold to shift what remained of the coal supply to keep the pumps available. It was, he said, the most eerie and nerve-wracking job he had experienced to that time. Freezing water swirled about their legs as they shovelled the coal, and as the ship lurched wildly and the beams cracked loudly, more coal was hurled on and around the workers. After many hours, the coal seemed to be secure; the pumps were working again. Worsley's diary for 26 October reads:

Very heavy pressure with twisting strains racking the ship fore and aft, and opening butts of planking 4 inches and 5 inches on starboard side; at the same time the stout little ship could be seen bending like a bow



By November 1915 the *Endurance* had been crushed by the ice and abandoned by the crew. She finally sank on 21 November. T.H. ORDE LEES COLLECTION, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON

and gallantly recovering against titanic pressure. Lowered boats, gear, provisions and sledges on floe. All hands pumping all night. A strange occurrence was the sudden appearance of eight emperor penguins, at the instant that the heavy pressure came on the ship. They walked a little way towards the ship, then halted and after a few ordinary calls or cries, proceeded to sing what sounded like a dirge for the ship.

Even the sparse wildlife seemed to appreciate that something was dying on the ice, as Worsley described on 27 October:

Pressure throughout day, increasing to terrific force at 4pm, heaving stern up, smashing rudder, rudderpost and sternpost. Decks breaking up. 7pm: ship too dangerous to live in. We are forced to abandon her. Water over-mastering pumps and coming up to engine fires. Draw fires and let down steam. Men and dogs camp on floe but have to shift camp twice with the floe cracking and smashing underfoot. Get little sleep.

The ship was abandoned just in time. Soon after camping on the ice, the crew heard the crushing and smashing of her beams and timbers. Upon examination, only six cabins had not been pierced by floes and blocks of ice. With the ship in her death-throes, and Frank Hurley busy recording the event for posterity, Shackleton assessed the situation. The *Endurance*, trapped for 10 months, had drifted 1300 miles through waters few people had ever been to.

Shackleton declared that he would lead the men over the pack ice to land, which Worsley had previously calculated was just over 300 miles away. The party should find a hut stocked with stores for just such an emergency. And he said they would all work to drag two lifeboats over the rough, broken ice, to open water. It sounded reassuring but, in private, Worsley had told Shackleton that the lifeboats would be damaged, and two boats would not be sufficient for the whole party. He suggested camping on the nearest flat iceberg and drifting to open water, where the three lifeboats could be launched.

Shackleton, of course, had his way. He knew the dangers of sitting around and waiting ... and waiting. Two lifeboats were rigged on sledges, and all but vital gear was dumped. Shackleton demonstrated how the load to be carried over the ice had to be confined to essentials, and leading by example, he discarded a handful of gold coins and his gold watch. Most non-essential personal belongings then followed, including Worsley's sketch books, books he later called his 'rough records of a vanished beauty', and many of the glass plates from Hurley's cameras.

On 30 October the march began, the first team trying to find a way through the chaos of ice ridges and pinnacles. Worsley had command of the two boats, with 15 men hauling them in relays. A huge stumbling effort of two hours in the late afternoon achieved an advance of one mile; next day they moved another mile. On the third day Shackleton decided to find a solid floe and camp there until conditions were better before making another effort to haul the boats. They established what became known as Ocean Camp, and moved the third lifeboat up from the previous camp site, much to Worsley's relief.

Life on the floe became boring and frustrating as they drifted vaguely north. The men lived in five tents that had to be moved from time to time as the surroundings became squalid and the snow around them a dirty quagmire. December arrived and Worsley logged the drift. To break the developing ennui, Shackleton proposed another sledge march with the boats. As before, the going was appalling and the progress negligible. On



Christmas Eve, leads in the ice were opening in the soft summer conditions, and in two days they made no more than 3 miles. Next day Shackleton and Wild returned from their morning route survey to find a state of near mutiny involving Worsley and McNeish. The carpenter had decided to stop work, and he refused to obey Worsley's order to resume duties.

McNeish had never liked Shackleton's plan to haul the small boats over the softening snow. Actually Worsley agreed that it was wasteful labour and possibly damaging to the boats, but now it was a situation in which an officer's command was being openly challenged. McNeish was no fool. He had wide experience of Ship's Articles, the contract that bound the crew in normal circumstances, yet with the *Endurance* lost, Ship's Articles had lapsed, he reasoned, and he was no longer obliged to obey the captain's orders. Shackleton had to put on a convincing performance with a shaky case, for McNeish may well have been correct. He called the party together and read Ship's Articles about the duty of each crew member to obey the lawful commands of the ship's master. He said this applied in boats or on shore. Then he claimed he was the master and they had to obey him; Worsley, he declared boldly, was the sailing master. This was not true, but it gave Shackleton the chance to assert his authority by presenting himself as both leader and master.

But Shackleton's most convincing argument involved wages. Because Ship's Articles had not terminated with the loss of the ship, neither had

The crew attempt to drag a lifeboat rigged on sledges across the pack ice. DULWICH COLLEGE, LONDON



Camping on the ice after abandoning attempts to haul the lifeboats. Frank Worsley is standing on the platform at the rear; Shackleton is the figure marked with an X. T.H. ORDE LEES COLLECTION, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON

wages ceased, thus pay would continue until they all reached port. It was a brilliant improvisation, and it achieved what was needed. The crew did their own mental calculations, and they were all happy to accept the wages lure. McNeish was then on his own. Face to face with Shackleton he was still prepared to argue. But in the privacy of the Boss' tent, Shackleton indicated that he would shoot McNeish if he continued with his interference. That ended the incident on the ice, although there were repercussions to follow. Neither Shackleton nor Worsley mentioned the drama in their books; McNeish did not enter it in his own diary. Thomas Orde Lees made a brief reference to the incident:

The abrupt termination to our march, begun under such propitious circumstances, has had a distinctly depressing moral effect on our party, especially the sailors, but it has also brought out the best in all, though it had shown up one or two in their true colours, notably the objectionable, cantankerous carpenter who was so grossly insubordinate to Captain Worsley on the march when hauling the boats that Sir Ernest found it expedient to call a muster and read over Ship's Articles.

In his diary, Shackleton said of McNeish, 'I shall never forget him in this time of strain and stress.' And he did not forget. Shackleton's revenge came when he named McNeish as one of the four men for whom he would

not recommend the Polar Medal after the expedition. This has raised much debate over the decades, with regrets expressed because McNeish's undoubted skills had done much to assist the bold rescue of the party. McNeish's family and other groups campaigned for a time to have a Polar Medal awarded posthumously, suggesting that Shackleton should have forgiven McNeish for his moment of madness, but that never happened.

It is on record, however, that Shackleton several times had expressed reservations about McNeish, but McNeish was a member of Shackleton's wardroom staff, and not just a simple sailor living below decks. The Boss expected, and was entitled to, unquestioning loyalty and obedience from his wardroom staff of ship's officers, the scientists, and artisans such as McNeish. If any of the wardroom had contrary views to that which Shackleton, as leader, was proposing, the wardroom was the place to air them. The Boss would listen and then declare the way ahead, and his staff were then expected to see that his orders were obeyed, and certainly not challenged later in front of the crew. McNeish failed badly in this respect and paid for it.

During the remainder of his life, the carpenter often expressed his dislike for Shackleton. One possible reason for McNeish's bloody-mindedness was the loss of his well-loved cat, Mrs Chippy. The cat was a creature of substance, very idiosyncratic and a great favourite among the crew. Worsley was a fan of Mrs Chippy (in reality, a male) and he wrote of her: 'She is wonderfully lithe and gracefully active like a miniature tiger. She is full of character and no-one ever knows what she will do next.' While on the ship, Mrs Chippy was protected, safe from the sledge dogs chained on the deck. On the ice, however, the savage dogs were in their element, and Mrs Chippy would soon have been torn to pieces. Shackleton deemed it more humane to kill her there and then, so she was shot. Worsley wrote that many in the crew felt this badly, and McNeish shed a bitter tear.

On 23 December 1915, during a period when the men were trying to sledge the two boats in the march to the west, aimed at Paulet Island, Shackleton recorded that the weather was fine and warm, and several men slept out in the open. 'One night however a slight snow-shower came on, succeeded immediately by a lowering of the temperature. Worsley, who had hung up his trousers and socks on a boat, found them iced-up and stiff; it was quite a painful process for him to dress quickly that morning.' The sledging operation continued for only a few more days before Shackleton gave up the labour and decided to settle on a solid floe and wait until the ice broke up. Worsley and McNeish were among those most pleased with this prudent decision. Worsley was even happier when the third lifeboat was brought up from Ocean Camp. The new site, which was to become home for nearly three and a half months, was named Patience Camp.

Worsley's biology report contained this item for 1 January 1916: 'One sea leopard killed, a savage beast, 12 feet long. Her weight is over 1000lb. Teeth are cusped like a crab-eater seal, but she also has four formidable fangs on

A painting by George Marston of the *Endurance* crew breaking free from the pack ice early in 1916.
T.H. ORDE LEES
COLLECTION, ALEXANDER
TURNBULL LIBRARY,
WELLINGTON



the front of her jaws. They attack without provocation, evidently looking on men as on penguins or seals.’

Orde Lees was the only man in the party who could claim to have any expertise on skis, and his diary on 8 January described how he took Worsley out for a run, with Worsley a passenger on the back of the skis, moving his legs in unison. Next day, Worsley got his own skis and went seal hunting with Orde Lees. Such outings helped to break the monotony of their lives.

The lifeboats now had names: the whaler was the *James Caird* and the two cutters were the *Dudley Docker* and the *Stancomb Wills*, all named after prominent supporters of the expedition. McNeish was working on the damaged boats, which needed his keen ability. He raised the freeboard with material salvaged from the *Endurance*, and he coated the seams with seal blood to hold in caulking. But McNeish was still complaining in his diary entry for 20 January: ‘We can’t get our sleeping bags dried as they are soaking wet as the heat of our body cause the snow under us to melt.’ And on 11 February: ‘There is nothing for it but to get into the sleeping bags and smoke away the hunger.’ Next day he confessed: ‘I smoked myself sick through trying to stifle the hunger this afternoon.’ On 14 March, with the men knowing that soon they would have to try to sail or row to safety, McNeish wrote: ‘Still we have some that don’t wish to get in the boats. They want to drift ashore, which we can’t do. I notice those are the ones that have never done a day’s work in this world and don’t intend to as long as they can act the parasite (sic) on somebody else. They know themselves to be useless and I expect they won’t be much more use in a boat.’

Orde Lees recorded in his diary on 20 February:

Captain Worsley and Blackborrow were sent out to kill penguins ... the surface, covered with freshly fallen snow, was terribly cloggy and they had much harder work than they had anticipated to tow home the loaded sledge, especially as Worsley ‘took queer’ through eating an experimental milk pudding which was the dish for luncheon. They were wet through when they arrived in camp, not through falling in the water but with perspiration, although they were lightly clad. It is quite unusual for anyone to sweat perceptibly here.

Orde Lees wrote on 25 February: ‘Worsley thinks he can see Mt Haddington, on Ross Island, 114 miles away. We doubt it, but he has wonderful sight. The mountain is about 7000 feet high.’ And on 27 March: ‘Close to huge berg we call Mt Haddington Berg, because Worsley mistook the dome on top for the mountain – though he won’t admit it, of course.’

By now the party was killing penguins by the hundred. Three hundred Adélie penguins were killed on 23 February, and another 300 on 3 and 4 March. Orde Lees recorded a penguin round-up on 31 March, during which half of the flock escaped slaughter ‘because of the impetuosity of one or two of the less-experienced hunters’. Worsley led the chase and the birds were finally killed and loaded on a sledge. Then they found to their dismay that what had been a 3-foot gap in the floe had widened to a big lead more than 50 yards wide. ‘We found a splendid square slab of hard floating ice, and on this Captain Worsley and Greenstreet ferried across, using boards from the sledge as oars,’ Orde Lees said. Shackleton saw their peril and tried to launch a boat to assist, but could not reach the at-risk party because of slush and had to haul the boat back on the ice. Finally Worsley got a rope across the gap, and a sort of pontoon bridge of ice slabs was constructed, over which the hunters crossed to safety with their booty. ‘We expected that Sir Ernest would have been extremely vexed about it, but strange to say that apart from saying he would send out no more hunting parties, he merely seemed pleased at our safe return,’ Orde Lees said.

Patience Camp had been drifting northwards with the pack ice to the edge of the Weddell Sea, and the continent was at last sighted: Joinville Island, at the northernmost point. But the castaways, now five months of drifting in endless monotony, as Worsley expressed it, were still too far away – about 60 miles. And suddenly danger was coming from a new quarter: icebergs. Worsley recorded that two bergs swept in and ‘came charging towards us, ploughing through the great masses of pack-ice as though this had been tissue paper’. Shackleton ordered preparations to get out of the way, even if that meant abandoning supplies. The mountains of ice approached relentlessly. Shackleton and Worsley stood together watching them. Worsley said of his leader, ‘He was quite cool and smoking a cigarette.’ Fortunately the current swept the icebergs off that line to remove the threat, but surely there would be more.

It was time to launch the boats.