



The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition

By Caroline Alexander

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In August 1914, days before the outbreak of the First World War, the renowned explorer Ernest Shackleton and a crew of twenty-seven set sail for the South Atlantic in pursuit of the last unclaimed prize in the history of exploration: the first crossing on foot of the Antarctic continent. Weaving a treacherous path through the freezing Weddell Sea, they had come within eighty-five miles of their destination when their ship, *Endurance*, was trapped fast in the ice pack. Soon the ship was crushed like matchwood, leaving the crew stranded on the floes. Their ordeal would last for twenty months, and they would make two near-fatal attempts to escape by open boat before their final rescue.

Drawing upon previously unavailable sources, Caroline Alexander gives us a riveting account of Shackleton's expedition--one of history's greatest epics of survival. And she presents the astonishing work of Frank Hurley, the Australian photographer whose visual record of the adventure has never before been published comprehensively. Together, text and image re-create the terrible beauty of Antarctica, the awful destruction of the ship, and the crew's heroic daily struggle to stay alive, a miracle achieved largely through Shackleton's inspiring leadership.

The survival of Hurley's remarkable images is scarcely less miraculous: The original glass plate negatives, from which most of the book's illustrations are superbly reproduced, were stored in hermetically sealed cannisters that survived months on the ice floes, a week in an open boat on the polar seas, and several more months buried in the snows of a rocky outcrop called Elephant Island. Finally Hurley was forced to abandon his professional equipment; he captured some of the most unforgettable images of the struggle with a pocket camera and three rolls of Kodak film.

Published in conjunction with the American Museum of Natural History's landmark exhibition on Shackleton's journey, **The Endurance** thrillingly recounts one of the last great adventures in the Heroic Age of exploration--perhaps the greatest of them all.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Melding superb research and the extraordinary expedition photography of Frank Hurley, *The Endurance* by Caroline Alexander is a stunning work of history, adventure, and art which chronicles "one of the greatest epics of survival in the annals of exploration." Setting sail as World War I broke out in Europe, the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, led by renowned polar explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, hoped to become the first to cross the Antarctic continent. But their ship, *Endurance*, was trapped in the drifting pack ice, eventually to splinter, leaving the expedition stranded on floes--a situation that seemed "not merely desperate but impossible."

Most skillfully Alexander constructs the expedition's character through its personalities--the cast of veteran explorers, scientists, and crew--with aid from many previously unavailable journals and documents. We learn, for instance, that carpenter and shipwright Henry McNish, or "Chippy," was "neither sweet-tempered nor tolerant," and that Mrs. Chippy, his cat, was "full of character." Such firsthand descriptions, paired with 170 of Frank Hurley's intimate photographs, which are comprehensively assembled here for the first time, penetrate the hulls of the *Endurance* and these tough men. The account successfully reveals the seldom-seen domestic world of expedition life--the singsongs, feasts, lectures, camaraderie--so that when the hardships set in, we know these people beyond the stereotypical guise of mere explorers and long for their safety.

Alexander reveals Shackleton as an inspiring optimist, "a leader who put his men first." Throughout the grueling ordeal, Shackleton and his men show what endurance and greatness are all about. *The Endurance* is a most intimate portrait of an expedition and of survival. Readers will possess a newfound respect for these daring souls, know better their unthinkable toil and half-forgotten realm of glory. --Byron Ricks

From Publishers Weekly

The unparalleled adventure and ordeal of Sir Ernest Shackleton and his crew, stranded on the Antarctic ice for 20 months beginning January 20, 1915, then forced to row a 22-foot boat 850 miles across storm-ravaged seas, has inspired at least three marvelous books: Shackleton's own memoir, *South*; Alfred Lansing's bestselling *Endurance*; and this stirring account by Alexander (*The Way to Xanadu*). In 1914, Shackleton sailed to Antarctica with 27 men in hopes of being the first human to transverse the continent. But his ship, the *Endurance*, was trapped, then crushed, by ice in the Weddell Sea, propelling the party into a nightmare of cold and near starvation. Alexander, relying extensively on journals by crew members, some never published, as well as on myriad other sources, delivers a spellbinding story of human courage (and occasional venality) in the face of daunting odds. She succinctly and boldly captures the character of the men and of the terrible land- and seascape they crossed toward salvation. What makes this book especially exciting, however, are the 170 previously unpublished photos by the expedition's photographer, Frank Hurley: stark, artfully composed tributes to the savage beauty of the ice and to the fortitude of the men and their dogs. Not one of the men died during their sojourn in a freezing hell; as Alexander makes clear in her gripping, emotionally resonant book, this incredible fact bears witness not only to Shackleton's leadership but to the strength of the human spirit. Agent, Anthony Sheil. Author tour. (Nov.) FYI: *The Endurance* is being published in association with the American Museum of Natural History, which in March 1999 will open an exhibit, curated by Alexander, chronicling Shackleton's voyage. A feature-length IMAX film on the subject will be released then, as well.

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From Library Journal

During Shackleton's 1914 expedition to Antarctica, he and his crew were trapped on ice floes for 20 months. Alexander is curating a forthcoming exhibition on their plight.

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Patricia Kirby:

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Lois Hutter:

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