

Scott of the Antarctic





The whole team in Punta Arenas before leaving



Linking up with other Arctic Trucks to refuel

I grew up at Worth reading stories of daring do and adventure, the likes of Shackleton, Hillary and Scott featuring heavily. When the time came to leave I had a vague notion that I would love to work outdoors, and to somehow visit some of the places I'd read about. I had little idea of how to turn this notion into a career, so after studying Theology at Bristol, I followed lots of my contemporaries into the City.

I spent a couple of years working for an oil broking firm but found office life difficult to swallow. Eventually I took a break and conducted my own expedition hiking solo from Glasgow to Cape Wrath, raising money for the Alzheimer's Society. The expedition made me realise that it was time to direct my working endeavours outdoors, to adventure, and to my passion for documenting what I saw through photography. After some good advice from family and friends I decided to train as a cameraman, and gradually, through a lot of luck and meeting some very kind people, I fulfilled my wish. As a freelance I have been to some incredible and interesting places, from war zones to remote wildernesses, but there had always been one place above all that I had wanted to venture to since reading about it as a school boy; Antarctica and the South Pole!

When I was asked to join the Willis Resilience Expedition to Antarctica in November 2013 my excitement at realising a childhood dream was huge. The expedition had a dual purpose - to test man's resilience in extreme conditions and to gather research data to help understand our changing planet. I was to be cameraman to Parker Liautaud, a 19 year

old American, as he struggled to trek 507km on skis in the extreme climate from the coast to the Pole. The plan was to fly in to Antarctica, via Punta Arenas in Chile, to a base at Union Glacier. There would be two parts to the expedition; in the first we would drive to the South Pole and then across to the Leverett Glacier, taking ice cores at regular intervals across the way to aid in climate change research. When we finally got down the glacier where the sea ice started, Parker and experienced Antarctic guide, Doug Stoup, would begin their attempt to break the record for the fastest journey skiing from coast to pole.

Showing its inhospitable nature right from the start we had to wait in Punta Arenas for 10 days for a weather window suitable for us to fly. On the plus side, the delay gave me the opportunity to meet and chat to Doug Allen, a huge hero of mine, and one of the BBC's top wildlife cameramen, who was on his way to film leopard seals. Finally given the green light to go we were told the flight would be that night. We went to one of the best restaurants in town for a last solid meal (we live off freeze dried food while on expedition), and had just ordered some huge Argentinean steaks when we got the call saying our flight had been brought forward and would leave in an hour - we had to leave before the steaks were even cooked!

The flight into Antarctica is usually the same whether you fly in via South America or South Africa. The only planes that can land on the blue ice runways are Russian Ilyushins, which are like something straight out of a Cold War film and crewed by ex-Russian Air Force members, many of whom



Left: Paddy with a replica of Shackleton's whisky he took on expedition Above: The Ilyushin Il-76, one of few planes able to land on blue ice

Scott of the Antarctic continued

I'm sure are Cold War veterans! We took off in night-time darkness and then as we flew south gradually saw the sun slowly appear over the horizon as we got closer to Antarctica. This was to be the last time we would see darkness for the next two months.

As we were already delayed 10 days we began our drive across the continent as soon as we landed. Many people think of Antarctica as being flat ice or a layer of flat soft snow, but in fact it varies enormously and you get anything from deep powder to hard blown waves of ice called sastrugi. Some of these can be up to 2 metres in height so rather than driving over them you have to wind your way through them as if in a maze, and often finding yourself at a dead end. The vehicle we were using to navigate the sastrugi was another highlight of the expedition. Arctic Trucks are an Icelandic company that make the kind of vehicles you see in comics, only much much bigger! They made the truck in which Jeremy Clarkson attempted to drive to the North Pole. Even so, our travelling speed across the unpredictable ice varied from 50kmph to as little as 8kmph in bad conditions, but with Eyjo, the brilliant Arctic Trucks engineer, on our team, we made steady progress.

One of the hardest things about being in Antarctica, aside from the cold, is the constant daylight, and indeed below a certain latitude the sun does not even dip but just rotates around the sky in a continuous loop 24 hours a day. This means it is very easy to lose all sense of time, and in our haste to make up the time we had lost at the start we were running on 30 hour days, travelling for 20-22 hours and then resting for 8. Lack of sleep, irregular hours and 24 hour daylight can make you quite confused, almost delirious. Time starts to become irrelevant and all that matters is distance travelled, a monotony broken by our scheduled stops to drill ice cores every few hundred kms.



Paddy with a bottle of Doyne-Ditmas Family Chilli Oil – a real treat!

After about 2 weeks of constant driving we finally made it across to the other side of the continent and then dropped off our two skiers. The expedition then changed dramatically and we started to follow the skiers at the pace they set as they trekked against the clock to set the speed record to The Pole.

For the most part conditions were good and the coldest temperatures we experienced were around -40, which as I found out on an expedition the following year, is relatively mild for Antarctica! High winds are always a problem, and a big fear is letting go of the tent while setting it up to see it disappearing in to the distance and having to sleep the rest of the expedition crammed into the truck.

After 19 days we reached The Pole on Christmas Eve, Parker and Doug had beaten the previous record of 21 days, although by a shorter route than the previous record - an impressive achievement.

After a few days rest Eyjo and I drove back to the base where we could catch the Ilyushin flight out while the others waited for a plane that would fly them back. This was my first chance to drive the 6 wheeled truck that had been our base for so long, and I can't deny that I was pretty excited to get behind the wheel of the ice crunching beast!

The guys from Arctic Trucks had told me endless stories of the hallucinations they had experienced while driving in Antarctica's endless whiteness on very little sleep, and whilst I believed them, I did think that they had possibly exaggerated the crazy visions! However about 10 hours in to my first stint behind the wheel, after not sleeping for about 36 hours, I experienced them at first hand. It is really extraordinary what the brain will do. I was seeing small blue men and sheep running around in front of the truck and it was all I could do to stop myself swerving to avoid them!





The pit we had to dig each time to get ice core samples



Paddy during his time at Worth

Although extremely tired, you are thinking clearly and telling yourself this is a hallucination, but the vision doesn't go away. The only explanation I can offer is that your brain being so sleep deprived and yet forced to stay awake needs to invent something other than the monochrome white landscape to look at in order to stay active.

After 56 hours of grueling driving with only two short stops, one to cook some food and the other to replace a wheel that had flown off, we finally arrived back to the base at Union Glacier. We were greeted with a couple of beers, which were a very welcome site!

When I finally touched down in Chile, the first thing that hit me was the smell. I had expected to be struck by the temperature change, which I was, but your sense of smell is so heightened after 2 months in the frozen landscape that you can smell the grass and the flowers beside the runway from about 300m! It feels great to get back and enjoy everything as if for the first time; showers, fresh food... more beers! Having spoken to others it seems everyone has a similar reaction being back, at first you swear that's the last time you will go to Antarctica, however within about a week of being back; the bad bits fade from memory and the idea of going back seems quite tempting. Indeed when I got the call 6 months later to ask if I would like to join another expedition driving a Massey Ferguson tractor to the South Pole, I did not think twice!

Paddy Scott (B'01)



Parker and Doug at the ceremonial South Pole



Paddy filming the skiers

