

**SCOTT 100!**

**ELEVEN  
MILES**

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# **„Whoever shows me a hero, then I show you a tragedy“**

F. Scott Fitzgerald, US-American writer (1896 - 1940),  
whose works include "The Great Gatsby", "The last Tycoon" and  
"The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"



**Captain Robert Falcon Scott (1868 – 1912)**

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# ELEVEN MILES

## Introduction:

In February, 1913 the whole world holds its breath. Everywhere, whether in Berlin, Moscow or Paris - from London to Cape Town, from New York City to Peking – no matter where, news spread like a wildfire and the British Empire is unexpectedly shocked and plunged into deep, devastated grief:

**The perpetual ice of the Antarctic has not returned her national hero Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his courageous men, but has kept them forever for itself!**

Written down in a diary, with dwindling strength and numb fingers, Scott writes his history beside his frostbitten companions to the last breath end. There is no language into which the epilogue and his last request are not translated:

“I do not think we can hope for any better things now. We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker, of course, and the end cannot be far. It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more. R. Scott. For God's sake look after our people.“ On the first side of his diary he comments: “Send this diary to my widow! R. Scott“.

Thereby Scott creates an indestructible monument for himself and his men up to today. Here is their story. It is a dramatic story. A story full of power and comradeship, strength, courage and bravery, about honour and pride, sacrifice and privation, about suffering and pain - but also about incapacity, stubbornness, ignorance and overestimation of one's own capabilities, and bad luck up to the unavoidable death.



Scott and his men at the South Pole – tiredly, disappointed, feebly - Amundsen was the first in the pole before them. None of them survives the return march. Wilson, Scott, Bowers (standing), Evans und Oates (seated), recorded with self-timer (source: common-freely).

## Who are Scott and Amundsen?



CAPTAIN ROBERT FALCON SCOTT, CVO, RN.



ROALD AMUNDSEN

Scott and Amundsen – two men, powered by prestige, national pride and personal ambition, to be the first human beings who set their foot in unknown areas till then. Two breathtaking lives of antique force:

Robert Falcon Scott, Englishman, is born on the 06<sup>th</sup> of June, 1868 in Devonport. With a lion in the heart, and with a lion in his coat of arms, he fights against the most hostile conditions for fame and honours.

His rival: Roald Engelbregt Gravning Amundsen, Norwegian, born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, 1872 in Fredrikstad. As once the mystic raven of the North, he is always a well deliberating, daring and distant companion of the gods on their battlefields, always giving advice, always there in need, to reveal the way, if one has got lost – this is Amundsen!

Their common characteristics limit themselves to easy parental relations, whereas Amundsen comes rather from a respectable skipper's family, while Scott grows up poor. Both have the compulsion to achieve something great. Both are most of the time broke. They are obsessed by the perpetual ice and both will die on it. Amundsen is missing to the present day in the high north of the Arctic, as he tried in 1928 to save his friend and competitor Umberto Nobile from distress at sea with an airplane. His body is never found.

Thus two absolutely different men fought for the conquest of the last white spot on the map. The farthest point for mankind has yet to reach - the South Pole - more than 1.500 kilometres of endless white deserts, merciless cold and blizzards. Their base camps lies only 100 kilometres apart.

The differences start with their appearances: Scott is small and strong, Amundsen is slender and lean.



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One of them (Scott) is ambitious, biting, drilled in the ways of the military, and dutiful, but also colourless and without leadership qualities, not able to take criticism at all. He loves nobody and is addicted to fame and honour. Scott is haughty. Scott follows the naval traditions of the family and aged 13 enters the Royal Navy. Indeed, on one hand, he is keen to use modern technology for the first time, but on the other hand, he is inconsiderate and negligent. He doesn't test this technology if once before it will fail him terrible at the end.

The other (Amundsen) is objective, a cool-headed northerner, taciturn and unassuming – a quiet loner, but also restless inside. Amundsen is an adventurer, a visionary with a sharp intellect. He lives together with Natsilik-Eskimos, learning their survival techniques. He knows how to deal with people, no matter whether in a team or under extreme tasks. Since his earliest childhood Amundsen is familiar with ice and snow, and he is a good skier. He tests his limits in the cold instead of going to school and dreams obsessively of the North Pole which lies within reach of his front door. Over and over again he tries to storm the North Pole, which he finally overflies only shortly before his death in 1926 with an airship.

In spite of Amundsen's own belief, that his best expedition was the first crossing of the Northwest Passage, his masterpiece undoubtedly is his trip to the South Pole. Already in 1909 Amundsen had started to besiege the North Pole, when the news - at the time liable - reached him, that Robert Peary had beaten him. He turned in a disappointment and announced an unexpected new goal: The exact opposite, the end of the world, the South Pole. This was provokingly cheeky, as the British had just sent their best man to the same goal.

It is only today that we realize a much bitter tragic behind his decision, because Peary has never reached the North Pole, ignorant or conscious. Not until 60 years later, the Scotsman Wally Herbert verifiably reached the magical point of 90 degree North, the Top of the world - by foot and with sledge dogs. What an incredible amount of time Amundsen had to make his dream come true – and to reach all prominent Polar landmarks as uncrowned king of all Polar discoverers: both poles, the Northwest Passage and the Northeast Passage. It was not meant to be. Still his fellow countrymen honour him, but to the day he his missing without a trace, lost in the everlasting ice of the Arctic, restless and unapproachable.



The Norwegians were the first to reach the goal. They raised the flag and left a message for Scott and his men behind – From left to right: Amundsen, Hanssen, Hassel and Wisting, photographed by Olav Bjaaland (December 14, 1911)

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Photos: Monument to Scott and his men in Plymouth, his native city and the point of departure over the centuries for many heroic British sailors such as Sir Francis Drake and Sir Robert Grenville in the fight against the Spanish Armada, Captain Bligh of Mutiny on the Bounty infamy, the voyages of discovery of Sir Walter Raleigh and the European emigrants who left on the Mayflower for America - the list is both long and exciting for Plymouth.

To this very day the British have not made public the personal letters of the expedition participants to their family members - as far as is known – it is understood the letters themselves are very contradictory. The military code of honour and British national pride presumably forbids damaging the reputation surrounding the man and the deeds of Robert Falcon Scott.

Scott writes in his diary: “Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale!”  
Now we tell the tale.

Even if frightening mistakes lead to the tragic end – Britons are allowed, nevertheless, to be proud of these men. These were great men in an incredible, great adventure!  
Here is their true story.



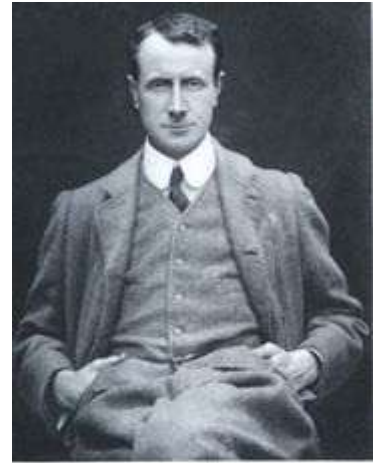


## Who is Dr. Edward Adrian Wilson?

Edward Adrian Wilson is born at the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1872 in the bathing resort Cheltenham in the southwest of England. The city enjoys a reputation as rich and noble. The region is considered as the heart of England ("Cotswolds").

Wilson grows up protected on a farm. He is clever, sensitive and sometimes also a little impetuous. Later Wilson studies at the Gonville and Caius College of the University of Cambridge. Today the college flag is still kept which he took to the South Pole.

During his medicine study Wilson gets sick at tuberculosis in the slums of London. He needs a long time to recover from it.



*Edward A. Wilson 23.7.1872  
from a photograph by Sir R. S. S. S. S. S.*



Gonville and Caius College,  
Coat of Arms,  
drawing by W.G. Blackhall & A. Cousins, 1931  
Superior Printers Ltd. London

Gonville and Caius College, Coat of Arms, drawing by W.G. Blackhall & A. Cousins, 1931  
Original print of the Polarworld Collection & Museum

As physician and ornithologist Wilson participates in two British Antarctic expeditions – both under Robert Falcon Scott. On his first travel after his marriage he accompanies Scott on his Discovery expeditions (1901 – 1904), an expedition consisting out of two single journeys with the attempt to penetrate as far as possible to the south.

On this expedition he becomes acquainted with a further polar researcher who is becoming famous later on by his Nimrod expedition (1907) and the legendary Endurance expedition (1914): Sir Ernest Shackleton. During the Discovery expeditions an unbelievable and never settled controversy between the two British polar heroes is inflamed.

Scott instructs the disappointed Shackleton to watch out for the sledge dogs in the basis camp instead of taking him along to the record raid to the South Pole. Later Scott describes him even as a "weak man". Wilson tried to reconcile. He even came through vehemently for Shackleton, but refuses also the participation in Shackletons Nimrod expedition and decides to undertake another attempt to the South Pole with Scott. Thereby Wilson belongs to those five men who reach the Pole on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, 1912 with Scott after the Norwegian Amundsen, but everybody dies during the return.

As a gifted subscriber Wilson makes a row of unusual watercolours and documents very worth seeing the expedition everyday life, sceneries and animals in a time where photography just began.

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Left: Cave in the barrier, Cape Crozier, Center: an halo and the „Discovery“; Right: The Great Ice Barriere looking east to Cape Crozier  
Artist: Edward Wilson, Sources unknown

Wilson is ranked as the finest guy in the best physical constitution who grows up very religiously and maintains up to his death his spiritual cheerfulness and calmness. All companions always turn to him if they need words. By all accounts Wilson was also the narrowest comrade-in-arms for Scott. When the search party finds the corpses later on of Bowers, Wilson, and Scott, the left arm of Scott still lies around the already frostbite body of Wilson.



**Left:** Paraselene at Cape Evans, drawing by Wilson, from the book “Edward Wilson: Nature Lover” written by George Seaver (1937, John Murray London)

**Right:** Wilson at work, from the book “With Scott to the Pole” retold by Howard Marshall (1941, Country Life Ltd London),  
Photo: Herbert G. Ponting, common-freely

## Who is petty officer Edgar “Taff” Evans?

Edgar Evans is born on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, 1876 in Rhossili (Wales) as a son of a sailor. Already 14-years-old he announces himself voluntarily to the Royal Navy. In 1899 Evans gets to know a Robert Falcon Scott on the HMS Majestic who serves there as a torpedo second lieutenant, and accompanies him, finally, already on the first Discovery expedition (1901 – 1904).



Evans is deemed to be a philanderer and a “hard worker”, a largely grown heavy giant in a muscular and well-conditioned body, who is pitching in everywhere – and even so he is also respected and appreciated by his intelligence and his loyalty. Thus originates fast his nickname “Taff”. Just for fun of the crew his big nose becomes an indicator for fucking cold weather because she blushes fast.

During the Discovery expeditions Scott selects young Evans and William Lashly for the successful record attempt to penetrate with the sledge farthest after the south (1903). After the return he marries in 1904 his cousin Lois Beynon. They have three children.

To the determining race to the South Pole Scott nearly would not taken him along, because he fell drunken overboard during the departure from New Zealand. Otherwise Scott although lives and acts strictly after military convention, he forgives his darling for the teeny-weeny misadventure. Also Scott ignores the not anymore outstanding physical constitution, because some bacon folds substitute for former muscles. Scott likes his inventiveness and astuteness, his strength and his courage. Probably of all things his size and his mass are leading Evans to the disaster.

Indeed he reaches on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, 1912 with Scott, Wilson, Bowers and Oates the South Pole, but Evans has not grown to the strain of the way back anymore and dies at first.

On the way there Evans cuts his hand open by rebuilding a sledge. The wound is roused and festers. By the cold and scurvy the hand does not heal. On the way back heavy frostbite come early in the fingers and nose. Evans diminishes physically and mentally quickly. He cannot go along with it any more in the sledge dishes and runs on the way back only laboriously behind.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, 1912 Evans falls in a dangerous ice column and injures himself hard on the head. His condition gets worse rapidly. A few days later in the Beardmore Glacier Evans collapse finally. The next morning, unable to get up and to go on, he is left behind, while the others go to the nearby next care depot. At the next night he dies when the companions return, they find only the lifeless maltreated body of Evans. It is not delivered what happens with his corpse. His dead body is never found.

In 1964 the Royal Navy names a building after Edgar Evans. It is the first time that a building is named not according to an admiral, but after an easy boatswain.



## Who is Captain Lawrence Edward Grace Oates?

17th of March - On this day in the history Lawrence Edward Grace Oates is born in 1880 in Putney, London, and on this day 32 years later he has also died on the agonising way back by the white desert of the Antarctic after the lost race around the South Pole (1912).

When his health situation gets dramatically worse, he leaves in the upcoming blizzard the protecting tent with the famous last words „I am just going outside and may be some time...“ Oates is not seen any more. He dies after Evans as second.

Oates makes these words which Scott holds on in his later found diary a monument of the typical English upper-class hero who sacrifices himself courageously for his companions not to be a burden any more.



The venerable Eton educates young Lawrence Oates. He adopts a military career and struggles during the second Boer's war, where he works one's way up to the Captain. A shot injury shatters his left thigh, but in spite of unexpectedly good recovery his left leg remains from now on 1 centimetre shorter.

Oates has the nickname "Titus Oates", to an English priest and conspirator who kindles in the 17th century a national hysteria and domestic crisis which is chosen even in 2006 the third-worst Briton of the millennium – this is a British humour.

Oates is rather outdistanced and sees something sombre, but it lies behind far more than the first sight lets assume, a rather entertaining muteness. There is a delightfully suppressed warmth in him which bubbles over now and then. If it comes to the hard and heavy work, he is always a great help. If something disturbs him with his companions or his commander, he withdraws to the horses.



Oates with his Ponies (left, Herbert Ponting, Royal Geographic Society, common-freely) and at the horse stable (1911, Source unknown)

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Scott picks up Oates because he supports the expedition financially and can handle with horses. He will never find out that he has a subsidiary from a former affair with a person under age.

Although he can show no experiences in the ice or with expeditions, Scott chooses him even in the 5-headed Pole team. Oates hides his old war injury which hinders him increasingly. Between both it comes several times to the quarrel, he criticises the management style of Scott and recognises planning mistake. Oates makes no secret not to be able to suffer Scott and would chuck everything if it does not concern a British expedition.

On the way back from the South Pole the weather gets worse awfully. This cold and these storms are unusually hard even for the Antarctic. Oates diminishes rapidly. After the death of Evans he soon becomes the load for the others. He hinders massively the advancement of the team. Nevertheless, the remaining three do not want to leave him behind, although it is recognizable that an improvement is not possible any more and their own survival chance clearly reduces with every hour Oates stays.

Oates has expressed itself at the beginning of the expedition unsuccessfully to pick up a revolver. He asks several times for morphine, nevertheless, he receives no enough big dose to put an end to his life. In the blustering blizzard he leaves the tent to die outdoors, with the words: „I am just going outside and may be some time ...“

Unfortunately, the gesture does not help any more. Scott, Bowers and Wilson die shortly before achievement of the next food depot. The team would have survived, if Scott had followed the former council by Oates to build up the food depot at another place - precisely those 11 miles closer in what now was missing.

His corpse was never found, only his sleeping bag, cut open so that he could ease his frozen feet easily into it. The search team which found it put some stones on it as a memorial and a note stating: “Hereabouts died a very gallant gentleman...”



In order to save his comrades, the drastically weakened Lawrence Oates left the safety of the tent in a snowstorm.

(Painting 'A Very Gallant Gentleman' 1913, by John Charles Dollman 1851-1934, Cavalry Club)

## Who was Leutnant Henry Robertson „Birdie“ Bowers?

Bowers was born on 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1883 in Greenock, Scotland. After his father died suddenly in Rangoon, his mother brings him up alone. As a sea cadet, Bowers serves in the merchant fleet, sailing several times around the world. Aged 22 years, he signs on with the Royal Indian navy in Ceylon and Burma and commands a gunboat. Later he fights gunrunners and smugglers in the Persian Gulf.

Bowers is only 5'3" short (160cm), stocky, has red hair and a conspicuous nose, which earns him the nickname 'Birdie'. He is tough, reliable and always in a good mood, recognizably simple and straight forward, unselfish, persistent and his capacity for work is prodigious.

In his diary Scott writes about Bowers: "As the troubles have thickened his dauntless spirit ever shone brighter and he has remained cheerful, hopeful, and indomitable to the end."

As a child Bowers wrote a letter to "the inhabitants of Wilkes Land" in the Antarctic: "Dear Eskimo, Please write and tell me about your land. I want to go there some day. Your friend Henry "



Bowers reads about Scott's Discovery expeditions and Shackleton's Nimrod expedition. Without experience of polar expeditions he applied to Scott with the recommendation of Sir Clements Markham, a large sponsor and advocate of Scott. Markham is most impressed by Bowers when he gets to know him in the naval service. When they meet for the first time, Scott was not so impressed by the short stout young man. "Well", Scott says, "we're landed with him now, and must make the best of it". But Bowers quickly proves himself as a highly-skilled organizer.

First it was intended he should be only a part of the ship's crew, but Scott promoted him soon to be a member of the shore party responsible for landing, stores and goods, arrangement of sledging and ashore rations and navigation equipment, a role which, due to his unusual memory abilities, Scott came to rely on.

Scott had originally placed Bowers in his second sledge team accompanying him southward as the last support party to the South Pole that were supposed to turn around before the last crucial assault on the pole. Scott suddenly decided, completely unexpectedly, to take another man with him - Bowers!

This was despite the fact that the tent was already crammed and there were only rations enough for four men. "We must close ranks and make the rations smaller!" he declared. A simple and perhaps even feasible solution, but not for the extreme mankind-hostile Antarctic, the forthcoming task to conquer the pole and to return home again alive. Besides that, Bowers did not have skis with him and walked the whole way on foot alongside. The disadvantage was not too serious, because in comparison with the Norwegians, the Englishmen were quite awkward and untrained when it came to handling skis.



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On the polar plateau only few days before the pole group recognizes that Amundsen beat them (from left to right: Evans, Oates, Wilson and Scott, photo taken by Bowers; Source: Scott Polar Research Institute / Royal Geographic Society, common-freely)

Scott probably decided on an additional man with navigation experience to accurately predict their position at the South Pole so there could be no doubts like those that arose with Robert Peary and Frederick Cook in relation to the North Pole discussion.

Bowers saw first a black marker at the pole and it became clear the race against Amundsen was lost. It then took another two days against an icy head wind to reach the pole at all. Hardship, tiredness, privation, agonies - and now the disappointment - robbed the will from the men and, more and more, the strength to hold on. The return journey became the sole worry and Scott thought: "It will be a wearisome return!"

The Norwegians had plenty of food and supplies, considered leaving some behind along the route for Scott. But Amundsen didn't dare to, assuming the proud and allegedly well organized Englishman would have enough. Thus Amundsen left only a scarce personal message for Scott and a letter for the Norwegian king. He asked Scott to carry the letter forward if he and his men did not survive the return trip. Also for Amundsen, the return way was long and home was far away, much could happen to them, too.

On the return march – too weak, frozen and hungry to continue, battered by violent snowstorms, unable to fight on and after the death of Evans and Oates – finally Scott, Wilson and Bowers died on (or soon after) the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1912 in their tent.

They were only 11 miles away from the next life-saving depot, at a spot where Oates had suggested the provisions should be. But Scott had insisted vehemently on his original plan and installed the depot now unsurmountable 11 miles further north – after 2,500 miserable miles of sledge hauling through endless bizarre ice formations, bitter coldness and hostile storms...what a tragedy.

Unlike Scott, Bowers does not have the strength or talent to say good-bye heroically. His letter to his beloved mother is rather quietly. He wrote: "Oh how I do feel for you when you hear all - you will know that for me the end was peaceful as it is only sleep in the cold."

## To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

The bodies of Evans and Oates were never found. The tent in which the search party found the frozen and battered bodies of Scott, Wilson and Bowers was as last resting place covered with snow as a cairn, marked with skis tied into a cross. They were just 11 Miles away from the next lifesaving food storage depot.

High over the base camp on a hill, where today Scott's hut is surrounded by international research stations, there has been erected a large wooden cross. Chiselled into the wood are the names of the dead and a quotation from a poem:

“To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield“



Heroes and monuments for eternity. **Left:** Gravesite of Scott, Wilson and Bowers (Source: Herbert Ponting, public domain); **Right:** Consolidating the letter on the top of the wooden cross, 2009 (Source: courtesy of the National Historic Museum, Antarctic Heritage Trust, [www.nhm.ac.uk](http://www.nhm.ac.uk))

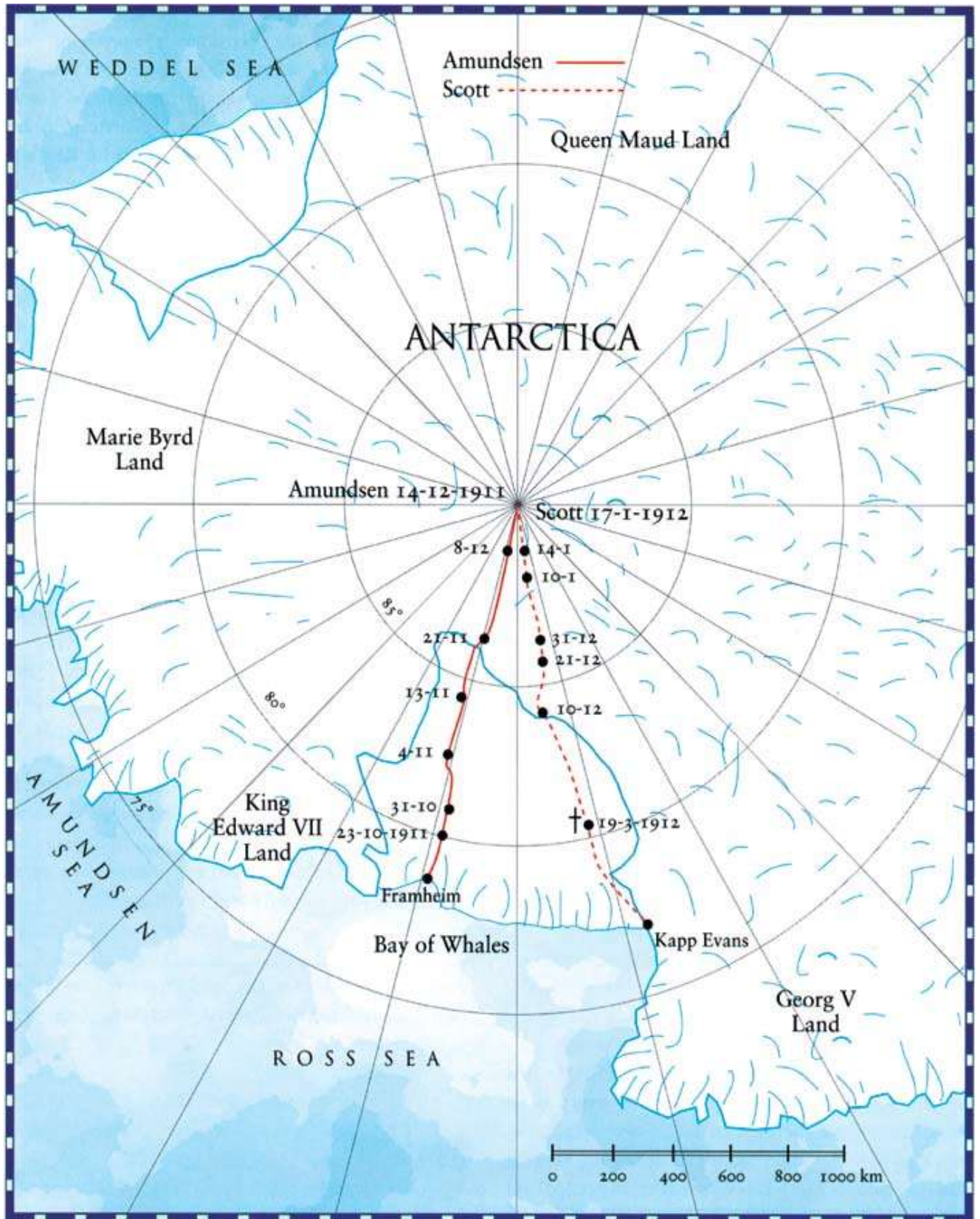
**Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.**

Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), „Ulysses“ (1833)

The poet's mother incidentally was a sister to famous British Polar explorer Sir John Franklin.

# ELEVEN MILES

## Map of the trekking routes of Scott and Amundsen



Routes of Scott and Amundsen crossing the Antarctic continent to the South Pole. Source: unknown