

Endurance (1914-16 Antarctic crossing) by Alfred Lansing (1959)

The voyage almost never happened due to lack of funds & then the break out of WWI. Sir Ernest Shackleton sold the rights to photos, books, movies, etc to pay for the exploration. 5000 applied for the 27 openings to go with him. The 144-foot-long ship left London with her 350-hp engine on 1Aug14 and left Buenos Aires Oct 26. By Christmas they were in loose ice pack, but by Jan 18 they were froze in the ice & moved at the mercy of the current below & wind above (some days they would drift 14 miles). The light show was great from the Aurora Australis (southern lights).

1Aug15 the floe broke open & the ship was free, only to be trapped again, but this time it would not escape. On 27Oct15 Sir Ernest Shackleton & 27 men watched their ship being crushed by 10 million tons of ice driving against her two-foot thick sides (it sank Nov 21). With temps at 8 degrees below zero (-30dF & winds reaching 70 mph in the winter) the men had to leave the safety of the ship & setup camp on a drift with as much supplies as they could salvage. They were castaways 1200 miles from the nearest human outpost.

At first, they set out on foot, but there were too many supplies (they would need just to survive) & their 3 small life boats (they would need if they survived) to move (especially over 20' pressure ridges). They decided they need to set camp & wait as the currents moved them closer to open sea. They had to leave valuables that did not contribute to their survival (but they did save journals & some photos).

They faced blizzards & hardships beyond your imagination. They lived in a modern-day ice age for over a year. They rationed food & when things looked bleak, God provided seals & penguins (even a 1000-lb sea leopard with fresh fish in its stomach) for food & fuel. The nice thing is they didn't need refrigeration. Ultimately, they had to kill the sled dogs. Shackleton realized his strength can become his weakness when his optimistic self-confidence at times blinded him to reality.

The sextant helped tremendously in given them their location & setting course home. Mar 23 land was spotted. They were hoping to drift to Paulet Island, but there was nothing they could do when they did not come near it. Mar 28 their floe split down the middle of their camp. They need the flow to open up before they went past Elephant Island out to Drakes passage & open sea.

As small as their flow was, it was still better than being in the boats & once they got in the boats there was no turning back. Their flow started at a mile in each direction melted down to 50 yds when on Apr 9 they climbed in their boats. The next day they were caught in a cross sea (when current is moving opposite if the wind) & were taken 22 miles off course.

After 6 months of waiting, they were now actively doing something & it wasn't going good. Sometimes they would have to break off the ice forming on the boats. And on the boats, they didn't always have enough ice to make fresh water. They went 2 days without water until they came upon some ice floating by their boat (what a God send). They were able to hoist sails, but the boats moved at different speeds. They were separated in the night & only found each other when they couldn't find a safe place to land & kept moving toward each other. The first

time in 497 days they were on land (Elephant Island) and God had water & food (penguins & seals) waiting for them. The next morning, they saw the high-water marks & knew they had to move.

The winds here hit 120 mph & were shredding their tents. They camped in a small cave or under their boats (turned upside down). They couldn't stay on this island, someone had to face the 800 miles of open sea & get help at S. Georgia Island. Cape Horn was only 500 miles, but the currents & wind took them NE. The party of 5 left on Apr 24 with 2 casks of fresh water & 6 weeks of food.

They men who stayed behind spoke of food or rescue. They waited & waited. Finally, they had to amputate the leg of the stow-away boy from Buenos Aires due to frostbite. The doctor also had to remove 2 pints of fluid from an abscess. The nearby glacier calved & sent a 40' wave their way, but they were spared.

The waves were big & water had to be pumped out every few hours. They were only traveling at 2 mph and had to go through the Cape Horn rollers (100' high crests a mile apart). You would think the wave would crash right over the top of the little boat, but buoyancy would lift it to the top & gravity would speed them down the other side. The navigational books were destroyed by water. The sails would get soaked & freeze. The sea anchor (more like an underwater sail to catch the currents) helped, but on May 2 it was ripped away.

The smell of spoiled meat came from their sleeping bags that couldn't dry out & some had to be thrown out. They found one of the casks of water had bad water & rations began. Hitting this island would be like a needle in a haystack. There was a break in the fog one day to get a visual of land & they set course on the bearing. With only 2 miles to land they heard breakers & had to go back to sea for 2 days since the storm would have crashed them into the breakers. They were able to land at another beach on 10May16 (522 days after they left it).

They were so exhausted when they landed, they couldn't get the boat out of the water. They tied it to a rock, got some food & water and went to sleep. At 2 am they had to save the boat from being pulled out to sea. They decided to hike the 27 miles over land rather than fight the 130 miles by sea to get to the town on the other side of the island. The land was inhospitable & several times they had to retrace their steps. They hiked for over 24 hrs before they heard the factory whistle. They found their way home.

They made several rescue attempts over the next 3 months until on Aug 30 the seagoing tug from Chile made it to Elephant Island. The castaways jumped into the boat leaving behind without a second thought the personal items that only an hour ago had been considered indispensable. These men were kept alive by hope in the man who promised to return. Theirs was an adventure where victory was measured only in survival. They all survived.

Quotes: "Without doubt a classic, rushing tale of the heroic age of exploration." (Sat. Review)
"A thrilling reading experience! One of the greatest adventure stories of our times." (NY Times)
"The greatest leader that ever came on God's earth, bar none." (one of his men)
Fortitudine vinimus translates "by endurance we conquer" (Ernest Shackleton)
"Hope tells a flattering tale." (Worsley)