



CAPE ADARE

FIRST USE OF DOGS ON THE CONTINENT

In February 1899 the first expedition to spend a winter on the Antarctic continent, became established at Cape Adare by the entrance to the Ross Sea. Led by Norwegian Carsten Borchgrevink, the party of ten men lived in two small huts they erected on Ridley Beach.

One of Borchgrevink's aims was to locate the South Magnetic Pole and to undertake sledging in the vicinity of Cape Adare. To do this he obtained a large number of dogs from Russia, and a further 10 Greenland dogs. Costing £2000, between 70 to 95 dogs were taken on the Southern Cross, along with 28 tonnes of Spratt's cod-liver oil, fish, meat and oatmeal dog biscuits. They were cared for by two Laplanders and were generally allowed to run wild although on 20 March, a severe storm, destroyed or blew most of their kennels out to sea.

Today there are still a few links with Borchgrevink's dogs. Nailed to the hut wall to block out draughts behind the Mess Stove, is a dog coat of woven from a coarse twill (fibre) and with trim and ties of red cotton braid. Two types of cloth appear to have been used. The other is a soft 'camel hair' (wool), which also lines the photographic darkroom. They were designed to be attached to the back of the animal, in a similar way to coats worn by dogs today. Other examples are elsewhere in the hut while a further link is a brass chain found outside in 1982.

But where did all the dogs go? Many died from fighting, some from the cold and sickness, while remaining animals left with the expedition in January 1900. Louis Bernacchi retained Joe as a pet and he later accompanied him on the Discovery Expedition. Because of penguins in mid summer, it is not possible for visitors to examine in detail, the area around the hut. However in late summer 1990, after most of the birds had vacated the rookery, remains of two dogs, one still with 'brownish-yellow' hair attached, were found in beach gravel. About the huts, weathered wooden pegs, some with rusting iron chains, protrude from the gravel and guano, which doubtless conceals other secrets of Ridley Beach.

*Prepared for the Antarctic Heritage Trust
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