Part 4: Antarctica

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To the south

Whilst moored in East India Dock the *Discovery* was visited by sponsors, establishment figures, past polar explorers and many others who had an interest in the expedition. There were many dinners to attend, people and institutions to thank. But by Monday 5 August 1901 the crew had returned from leave, the scientists were as well prepared as they could be and the ship left her moorings, heading for Cowes on the Isle of Wight. Here the King and Queen and other dignitaries inspected the ship, after which the King made a short speech wishing the expedition God speed and a safe return. Markham returned late that evening to say his farewells, hoping that the expedition into which he had put so much time and energy would end in success – and in the process bring glory not only to Scott and the expedition members but the country as a whole. The *Discovery* departed Cowes the following day, Tuesday 6 August 1901, at 11.45 a.m. and proceeded down the English Channel, heading south.

Scientific research was to be a crucial part of the journey south, with stops being made at Madeira, South Africa and other islands en-route to New Zealand. The scientific officers on board would make continual observations whilst transiting the Atlantic and Southern oceans and gather as many specimens as possible. Continual deep sea sounding and dredging would be undertaken. Fresh provisions and the sledge dogs would be picked up in Lyttleton, New Zealand. From Lyttleton the *Discovery* would head south towards the Antarctic continent and further explore the regions discovered by James Clark Ross, before setting up safe winter quarters as soon as practicable. The main objective of the expedition was the exploration of the interior of the Antarctic land mass which was at the time mainly unexplored, coupled with scientific endeavour. The plan of operations did not envisage the *Discovery* being locked in the ice for almost three years until the arrival of the relief ships, *Morning* and *Terra Nova*.

Polar explorative experiences and discussion aboard the *Discovery* as it headed south were minimal. Importantly, Commander Robert F. Scott had no previous experience working and surviving in the polar environment. A number of the officers and the crew were experienced sailors but only three men aboard had survived winters in the severe polar cli-

Scott and officers/scientists on board Discovery. *Note Koettlitz tall and serious as explained in the MacPhee introduction*

mate. And of the three only one of them had experienced the Antarctic continent – Louis C. Bernacchi, the expedition physicist, Australian born, who had wintered on Cape Adare with the Southern Cross expedition in 1899. The other two men were the first officer Albert Armitage and Dr Reginald Koettlitz. These three men brought with them considerable knowledge of the problems of over-wintering in the severe conditions that would be encountered on their arrival in the Antarctic. Although it was already known that the area in which the expedition would be based was mountainous, with huge glaciers close by which would need to be traversed to travel inland, not one member of the expedition had mountaineering experience or experience of climbing in ice conditions. Despite the wealth of mountaineering experience within the great institutions of London, Markham had been blind to this requirement on the southern continent.

It was not known at this stage of the voyage whether the leader would be prepared to listen to and learn from the more experienced men on board; Koettlitz was already doubtful. Scott was hoping that the expedition would further his naval career; he admitted that he possessed no knowledge of, or particular interest in, the techniques of polar travel and survival. The other naval officers and scientists with the exceptions mentioned above were in a similar situation. They were essentially enthusiastic amateurs, encouraged by the view in Edwardian England that English manhood would overcome all adversities – hence the keenness on the naval tradition of man-hauling. The departure of Professor Gregory

ensured Scott's complete control over all affairs and that the expedition would run on naval lines.

As the *Discovery* headed south towards Madeira it was realised that she was a slow ship in most conditions and that the journey to New Zealand would take much longer than anticipated. This would also restrict the use of the new dredging and tow gear which was essential to the gathering of scientific specimens for the scientists on board. By the evening of 14 August they were anchored off Madeira. This presented an opportunity for sending letters home and allowed the departure of Dr H. R. Mill, who had been on the *Discovery* to assist with the meteorological and oceanography aspects of the voyage. He also instructed the scientists who were to use this specialist equipment.

During this section of the voyage George Murray, Acting Chief of the Scientific Staff, wrote that the 'Baiting of Koettlitz had already begun – already he is showing his serious professional approach to the whole situation including his objection to a joke about the whale and her babies'. It was to be a long three years for Koettlitz. On leaving Madeira the 'Koettlitz baiting' continued, including to a lesser degree Hodgson and Ferrar, the official expedition geologist. Normally it was enacted by the Royal Naval and junior scientific staff.

Koettlitz and Dr Mill had been close confidants for some time. In April 1900 Koettlitz had confided to Mill 'that either him-self or Armitage should be the Chief of the Scientific Staff',[1] stating that all the others including Gregory were novices in this area having not endured polar winters and lacking the knowledge of 'all the scientific activities'.[2] He even asked Mill to support an application to the committee along these lines.

Once replenished with essential provisions the *Discovery* resumed the journey south, crossing the line with the usual antics amongst those for whom it was a first crossing of the Equator. This did not include Koettlitz, who frowned on such activities and regarded it as yet another excuse to stray from the real purpose of the voyage – gathering specimens for the advancement of science. Murray had previously instructed the other members of the ex-

Koettlitz on board Discovery *(sitting by the hydrogen tanks for the balloon ascent)*

pedition 'not to have horseplay with Koettlitz when crossing the line but do what they want with the younger men'[3] – although when the line was crossed and it came to Dr Koettlitz's turn Neptune said, 'Here Dr Koettlitz lean and tall forthwith into my bath shall fall' but he was let off lightly.

By early September they were heading for South Trinidad where a landing was planned. *Discovery* arrived off South Trinidad on 13 September. In a letter to his brother Maurice Dr Koettlitz confirmed that he had felt squeamish most of the time due to the continual rolling of the ship. After a hazardous landing six hours were spent looking for new specimens. One of the most notable results from this was the discovery of a new petrel, Wilson's petrel, named after Koettlitz's assistant surgeon and zoologist, Dr Edward Wilson. Wilson was a fine artist and throughout the expedition he recorded most of the specimens caught. His drawings are some of the finest ever completed in polar exploration. For Koettlitz, apart from getting relief from the ever present sea-sickness, the most interesting spectacle was the multitude of land crabs that inhabited the island, numbering in the thousands – but not as many as those described in the *Cruise of the Falcon* by E. F. Knight.

Whilst in the region of South Trinidad Murray wrote: 'Dr Koettlitz has found a new "Peridinium" and is beside himself over his first "babe", he couldn't leave it alone. Dr Wilson had to watch it while he was at tea. Royds then found many more specimens.' This sums up the Koettlitz attitude to the scientific aspects of the expedition; to him, scientific discovery should always be the primary objective.

From South Trinidad the *Discovery* headed for Cape Town where it was hoped leaks to the ship could be repaired and the ship refitted and coaled. Because of the slow speed of the ship under sail, the engines had to be used more than expected increasing coal usage. Cape Town was also an important stop in that magnetic observations were carried out there; these proved successful if time consuming. Cape Town saw the departure of Mr George Murray of the British Museum, who was leader of the scientific team. Murray had been due to stay with the ship until Melbourne, but this stop had been cancelled and the next port of call after South Africa would be Lyttleton, New Zealand. The change of plan was the explanation given by Scott for Murray's early exit but it was not the only factor.

Since the resignation of Professor Gregory, the debate as to who should head the scientific team had continued. Scott was adamant that he had the scientific knowledge to lead this aspect of the expedition in addition to the naval ones. George Murray thought otherwise, but following a meeting between himself, Scott and Armitage it was agreed he would leave the ship in Cape Town. This was on the understanding that Koettlitz would take over as scientific director. Murray wrote in his journal on 30 September: 'Shortly arriving in Cape Town, much to be done and get things squared up on board. There is still a lot to be done in handing over my duties to Koettlitz as Scientific Director.'[4]

Murray confirmed this in a letter to Dr Koettlitz:

Discovery at sea

1 October 1901

My dear Koettlitz,

> For dutiful reasons well known to you I am about to return to England, and with Captain Scott's concurrence, I desire to inform you that you will in future be recognized on board as the 'senior member of the Civilian Scientific Staff'.
>
> The duties of the members are defined by order of 18 August 1901, of which I hand you a copy, and since these are being performed faithfully and with full understanding I do not find it necessary to leave you with any other parting message than the earnest request that you will maintain by all means in your power the cordial relations that exist among the officers of the expedition.
>
> I am
> Yours very truly
>
> George Murray
> Chief of Scientific Staff[5]

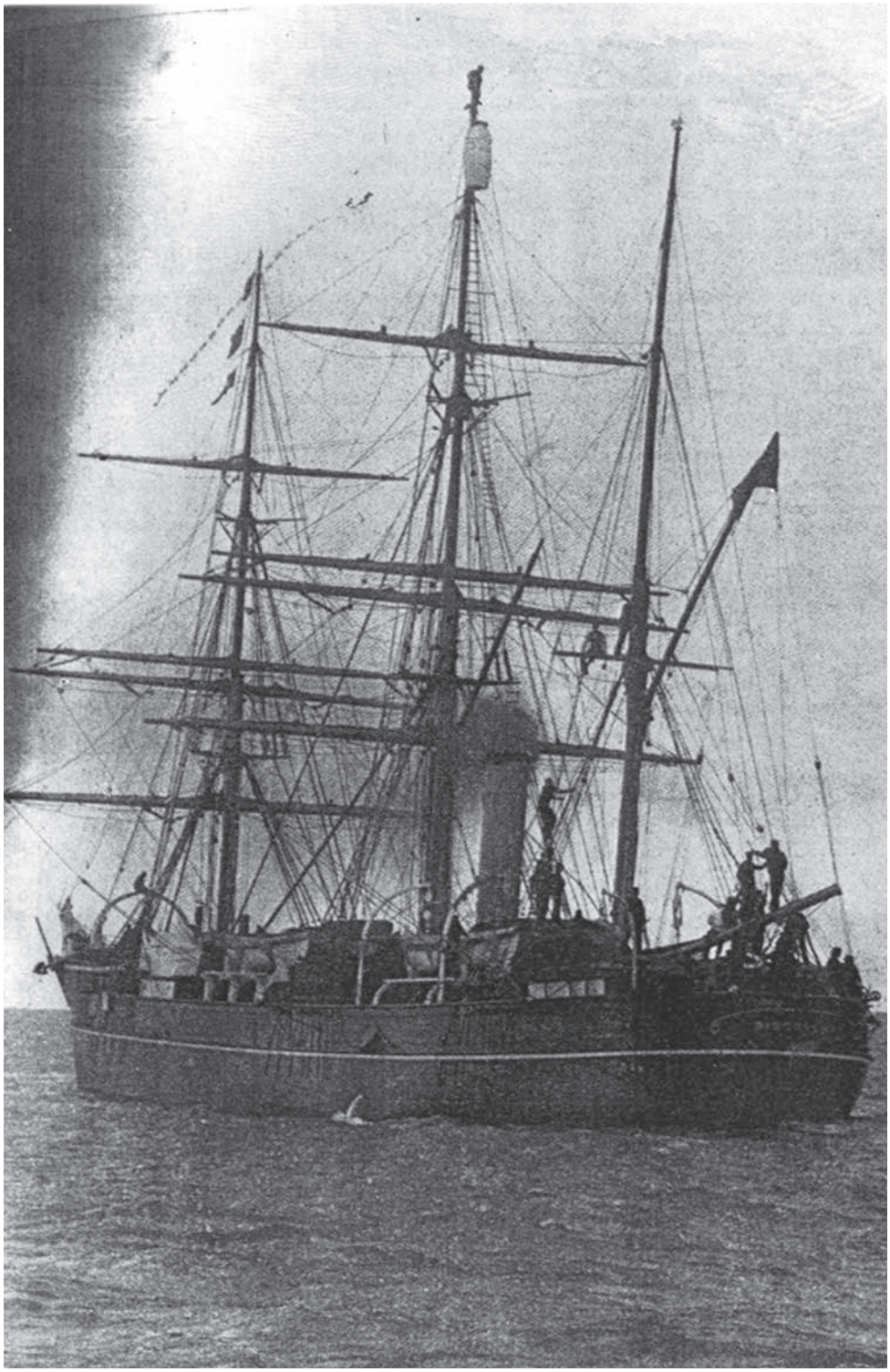
The letter conferred on Koettlitz the title 'Chief of Scientific Staff' and gave a warning to the doctor to be more forgiving in his attitude to the other expedition members. It seems that Murray already feared that not all expedition members would be able to adapt to Koettlitz's professional attitude.

This was a major change in the management structure of the expedition scientific staff. But Scott, in his book *The Voyage of the Discovery*, makes no reference to Murray's letter and the appointment of Koettlitz as Chief of Scientific Staff. It is obvious from this and from the letters subsequently sent home by Koettlitz that Scott disregarded Murray's letter and Koettlitz's appointment. Scott was now not only expedition leader but also the self-appointed head of the scientific staff, despite a lack of suitable qualifications and experience.

Both Mill and Murray returned to England and the *Discovery* headed on for New Zealand. Koettlitz had lost not only his confidants but two scientists with similar understanding of the expedition's scientific objectives. En-route to New Zealand the *Discovery* performed better and the scientific staff continued to take marine and other specimens at every opportunity. In particular, fine bird specimens were caught at regular intervals. On 22 November Macquarie Island was sighted and a landing made in Fisherman's Cove. The island had two large penguin rookeries, which included the large and impressive king penguin. Koettlitz was later to write up his views on Macquarie and compared it with the Falkland Islands.

After a short stay the *Discovery* headed for Lyttleton, New Zealand, where it berthed on 30 November 1901. Further examination of the ship's hull was required, to try to finally resolve the problem of leaks. There were large quantities of foodstuffs, including a flock of 45 sheep, coal and other equipment, to be taken on board. The small number of dogs that had arrived in New Zealand from Russia were awaiting their arrival. The entire expedition – officers, scientific staff and crew – were made most welcome by the residents of Lyttleton and nearby Christchurch.

Koettlitz was very impressed by the reception, writing to his brother Maurice in Dover: 'We have had a grand time in New Zealand and I have almost decided that, should no difficulties arise, I shall come and settle down here.'[6] He was confident of getting a practice in Christchurch. He confirmed this view in a letter to his mother, adding:



Discovery *departing New Zealand*

> What I like about the colonies, especially colonies like New Zealand, is that there is less class prejudice and littleness which is so obvious and ineradicable in the people at home, and on that account, if no other, I am sure you would soon feel much more at home than at home itself.[7]

Koettlitz felt suffocated by the class system in England, which was mirrored on board the *Discovery*. The great journey had hardly begun, with years still to come on the Antarctic mainland, but he already doubted the wisdom of being a member of this Scott-led expedition.

Whilst in New Zealand Koettlitz made four speeches and attended many dinners, both private and public. He spoke at the Philosophical Society and Citizens of Christchurch dinner and at both Girls' and Boys' High Schools end-of-term gatherings. Together with five other *Discovery* crew members he also visited a Maori village some 18 miles from Christchurch where he addressed the entire community. Following this he was presented with a Maori cloak, a tradition reserved for honoured guests.

His time in New Zealand was busy and, apart from attending the many functions, he also prepared botanical and other specimens he had collected on Macquarie Island ready for dispatch to England. He compiled an important article for the *British Medical Journal* on scurvy, insisting that scurvy would be avoided if his advice was followed.

Koettlitz was most excited at the contents of a letter from Weld Blundell concerning results from some of the geological specimens he had found in South West Abyssinia: these had been confirmed as gold. Blundell had formed a company with the objective of mining for gold in the region, with Koettlitz as a shareholder. But, as with many grand plans, this never came to fruition.

The stay in New Zealand had been very satisfying for Koettlitz; he was impressed with the country and in particular the people and looked forward to returning.

First, however, there was the small matter of breaking through the Antarctic pack ice and reaching the Antarctic continent without mishap. The *Discovery* was packed to the gunnels with every type of stores, equipment and animal needed to survive in the extreme conditions of Antarctica. The residents of Christchurch and the surrounding region gave the *Discovery* a rousing send-off at 2 p.m. on Saturday 21 December. All went well until the excitement of the occasion got the better of Seaman Charles Bonner, who fell from the mainmast and died instantly. This led to a short delay whilst he was buried with naval honours. The *Discovery* took on further coal supplies at Port Charmers, making a total of 330 tons, and by Christmas Eve 1902 the lights of New Zealand were slowly fading away as the ship headed south.

1. Letter from Koettlitz to Dr H. R. Mill dated 13 April 1900, written from Dover. Original in Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) Cambridge.
2. *Ibid*.
3. Mentioned in *Two Years in the Antarctic* by A. B. Armitage and journal of George Murray, Acting Chief of Scientific Staff, 29 August 1901.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Letter from George Murray to Koettlitz dated 1 October 1901, *Discovery* – Murray collection, SPRI.
6. Letter from Koettlitz to his brother in England dated 23 December 1901 – Koettlitz family archives.
7. Letter from Koettlitz to his mother in England dated 21 February 1903, *Discovery* Winter Quarters – Koettlitz family archives.