

FOREWORD

The event of importance in the polar regions which must claim pride of place in this issue of *The Polar Record* is the establishment of a camp of scientists at the North Pole by the Russians. This is the logical outcome of much work in the past by the Northern Administration, under the able direction of Professor Otto Schmidt, who has recently been awarded the Order of Lenin in recognition of his work.

We offer our hearty congratulations to all concerned in this expedition which, like most of its predecessors under the Soviet regime, has the dual purpose of pure science and of economic experiment.

The value to hydrographic science of a party living for a long time at or near the North Pole and separated from the ocean only by a few feet of ice is easily assessed and should be immense. The meteorology is perhaps even more important. How far the experiment of a half-way station for a Europe-American air route will succeed is for the future to show, and it will depend largely on the extent of the wandering of the station on the sea-ice, under the influence of winds and currents.

That a party should contemplate a year under such conditions says much for their courage, but equally as much for the organisation and for the degree of efficiency to which recent inventions in aviation and wireless communication have reached. It is moreover fitting enough that the nation which owns the greatest frontage to the Arctic Ocean should be the pioneer in this fresh attempt to discover the possibilities of the Arctic.

In the middle of May there returned to this country Mr John Rymill and eight of his companions, members of the British Graham Land expedition, while the ship's party with the ship, *Penola*, will arrive in August. After nearly three years away this expedition is slipping back as quietly as it set out.

While this minimum of publicity is in refreshing contrast to the methods of some expeditions, it has, to some extent, prevented the public from realising the value of the work this British party has been doing.

The geographical results are easily stated. Sledge parties managed to go as far as 72° S., which is over 400 miles farther south than any previous land party had penetrated. The surveys by these parties have been sup-

plemented by many short flights with a small aeroplane. A particularly interesting and illuminating result is the overwhelming proof of the superiority of sledge parties over aeroplane observation in the matter of recognition and mapping of topographic features. As a result of the adventurous and excellent flight of Sir Hubert Wilkins in 1928–29 the whole extent of Graham Land, which had formerly appeared in atlases as a peninsula, was changed into an archipelago of large islands dissected by channels, apparently cutting through from the Weddell Sea to the Bellingshausen Sea. The work of Rymill and his men now shows that none of these channels exist, but that the difficulty of navigating and of flying level had led the airmen and their topographic plotters to mistake glaciers, sometimes 6000 ft. above sea-level, for channels. Graham Land therefore once more, and finally, becomes a peninsula.

An even more striking instance of the difficulty in recognising differences of ground-level from the air is shown by the discovery of an almost unique feature by one of Rymill's sledge parties. This is a deep channel at least 250 miles long and rarely more than 25 miles wide, with mountains on either side rising to 8000 ft. This extraordinary land form was flown over by Mr Lincoln Ellsworth in his wonderful transcontinental flight a year earlier without being noticed. His track, as plotted from his records, appears to pass along the southern portion of this rift, and possibly a re-examination of his aerial photographs in the light of the ground party's discovery may show the feature, hitherto unrecognised.

As stated in a former issue of *The Polar Record* this flight was a wonderful achievement from the point of view of aviation, particularly on account of his landings *en route*. As a method of topographic discovery, however, it is clear that much less can be expected from aerial exploration than was supposed, and it would almost seem that a land party should, when possible, repeat the route of the aeroplane to show where it went and explain what it saw.

The surveys made by the British expedition are excellent, and before long this hitherto unvisited part of the Antarctic will appear in maps which are probably more accurate than those of any other part of that continent.

An aspect of the expedition which deserves comment here is its cost. It has been by far the cheapest expedition of its size and duration that has ever visited the Antarctic. This is, however, not entirely a matter for congratulation, since its cheapness was responsible for several serious omissions or hindrances in its equipment, particularly as to the engine-power of the ship.

Had there been only 10 per cent more money available the results would have probably been 100 per cent more comprehensive, but it is a remarkable feat to have done so much on less than one-third the cost of some of the major expeditions immediately before the war.

OBITUARY

We regret to have to record the death of two of the officer members of Captain Scott's last expedition. Mr Cecil H. Meares, who died recently in Canada, was in charge of the dog teams on that expedition and a member of the main party for the first year, accompanying the Pole party as far as the Beardmore Glacier. Before that time he had travelled widely in Eastern Asia, including a journey to the dangerous country of the Lolo tribes on the borders of Tibet.

Paymaster Captain F. R. H. Drake, R.N., was secretary to the expedition on the R.Y. *Terra Nova*, remaining with her throughout the commission.

The recent untimely death of Mr A. W. Moore will be deplored. He accompanied two of the Oxford University expeditions: to Sarawak in 1932, and to Ellesmere Land in 1934. He was a student of Forestry at Oxford due to go to West Africa when, on a visit to Switzerland, he died suddenly of pneumonia.