

Editorial

Storytelling, exploration and science at the end of the world

On 9 March 2022, the Endurance22 expedition team and The Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust announced to the world that they had seen Sir Ernest Shackleton's ill-fated ship, the *Endurance*, for the first time in 107 years. The Endurance22 expedition made history not only for their triumphant find, but also for their successful media, outreach and education programme. Storytelling provided the means for promoting the expedition and, together with modern technology, also boosted the communication of important scientific research in Antarctica.

Within hours, emblematic footage of the *Endurance*'s brass nameplate and 'polestar' icon pinged into televisions, computers and smartphones everywhere. [Photographs and video footage](#) showed the hull of the ship as intact as it was in 1915, when it was partially crushed by sea ice and sank in the Weddell Sea, coming to rest on the seabed only 7 km away from its last recorded position at the surface.

In the years before television and radio, the Antarctic explorers really were the 'A-list' celebrities, and the public were hungry for their stories. Shackleton was a visionary who would have been very at home on TikTok and Instagram because he clearly understood the concept that if it's not on camera, it didn't happen. He knew that helping people to see - not just hear - about his expeditions was key to his success.

Using early 20th-century technology, Shackleton's team documented their expedition in extraordinary detail. The official photographer Frank Hurley's celebrated *South* is considered to be the world's [first ever documentary feature film](#). Despite the evolution in photography and video technology over the last century, the cutting-edge BBC documentary series *Frozen Planet II* (seen by people of all ages and across cultures in living rooms around the country and across the world) has a fundamental aspect in common with *South*: both bring to life a place that most people will never have a chance to see for themselves and engage audiences regarding the issues that affect the polar regions.

Today's technology means that it's possible to reach broader audiences, leading to a democratization of exploration storytelling. Historian and broadcaster Dan Snow, a member of the Endurance22 expedition, has always been a visionary not only in specialist factual television broadcasting, but also in the use of social media. Whilst television documentaries can reach mass audiences, they are also limited by being highly dependent on the final outcome rather than providing an opportunity to bring viewers along for the ride. For Endurance22, Dan teamed up with filmmaker Natalie Hewit to explore the benefits of real-time communication using social media, and they took the decision to live stream the expedition with regular updates on TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, podcasts and subscription video on demand (SVOD) platforms.

The story of the hunt for the *Endurance* built up a head of steam; live bulletins were being requested by major television stations even before the discovery of the wreck. Endurance22 provided a real proof of concept that, by getting people engaged in a story as early as possible and in real time, they will then invest their own time to follow the plot. This boosted outreach potential, but also fed into a highly successful education programme. Schoolchildren around the world were excited by the expedition, and they clapped, laughed and cheered along as the story unfolded.

Social media revolutionized Endurance22's capability to promote polar exploration in the modern world. But could it do the same for the communication of polar science? Science had its place on Shackleton's expedition, but it often takes a secondary role to exploration in historical accounts. Similarly, science played a part during Endurance22, with an international team of scientists on board carrying out research into sea-ice dynamics, weather and remote sensing. The Weddell Sea is a critical region for climate change research, having experienced significant and rapid changes in sea-ice extent and drift in recent decades, but it still represents a major challenge to ocean climate modellers.

How can we get these critical climate science endeavours and messages out to a broader audience? One option would be to include more science background in documentaries themselves. However, the critical centre of the vast majority of documentaries is the clear telling of a singular, focused story, and only threads that move that story on can be included. This means that, for many documentaries, a wealth of fascinating subject material ends up being cut and left on the - nowadays metaphorical - editing room floor.

For Endurance22, however, this subject material, including not only the critical scientific investigations, but also footage about the lives of the scientists on board, could be covered using social media, online broadcasts and podcasts. Stories that would have been lost were now able to find an audience.



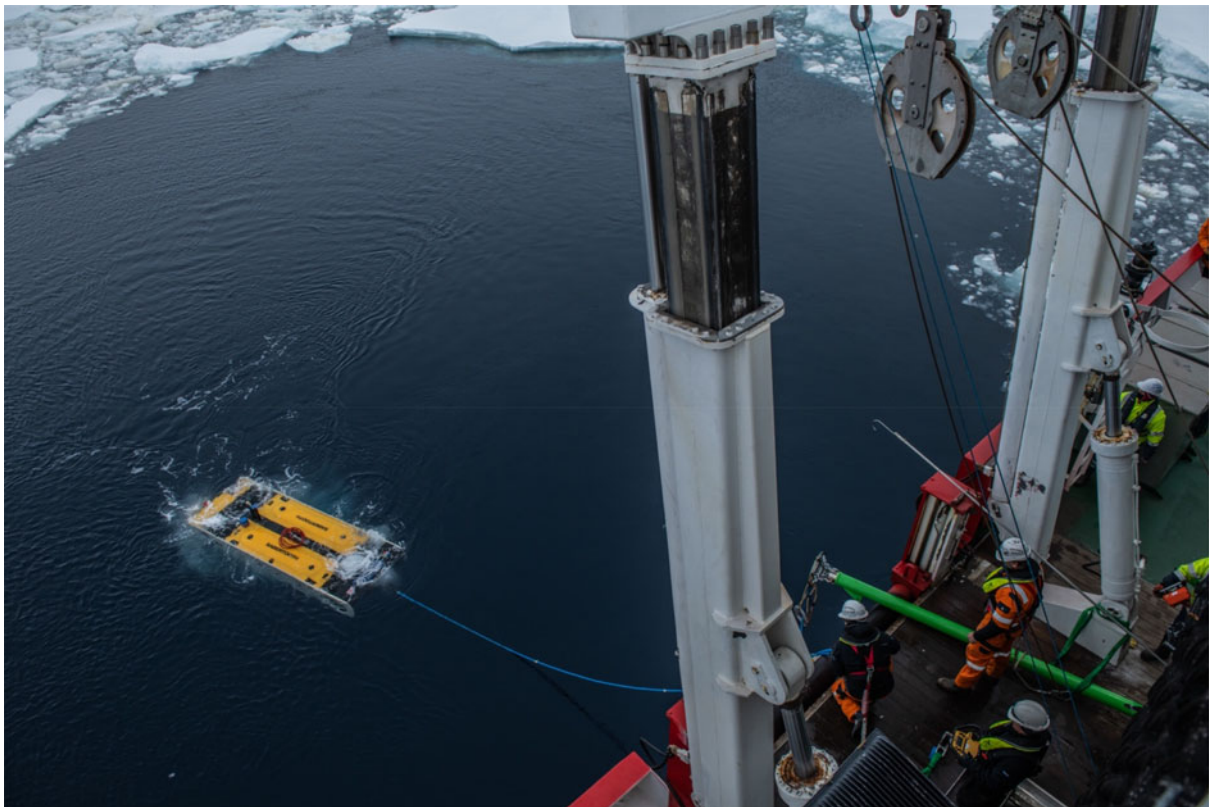
The stern of the *Endurance*, copyright Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust (2022).



Natalie Hewit filming scientists on Weddell Sea ice during Endurance22, by Esther Horvath, copyright Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust (2022).



The R/V *S. A. Agulhas II* in the Weddell Sea during Endurance22, by Esther Horvath, copyright Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust (2022).



The remotely operated vehicle used off the R/V *S. A. Agulhas II* to image the wreck of the *Endurance*, by Esther Horvath, copyright Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust (2022).

With more live streaming and real-time social media posting possible during field expeditions, this form of storytelling is changing how we communicate the excitement of remote science to a wide audience. Stories about past exploration can teach us about perseverance - and that from failure can come great achievements - but they can also help us learn about how to move forward into a more equitable future. Stories about modern expeditions to 'far-away' places are inspiring. And stories about science can help us make sense of who we are, our universe and our place within in it. Using multiple communication channels and platforms, Endurance22 was an example how it's possible to weave these different threads of human endeavour together to build a rich and varied story, allowing the different voices involved to be accessible to all.

Katharine Hendry is an ocean climate scientist at the British Antarctic Survey. Natalie Hewit is an award-winning documentary director who has a passion for human stories and the polar regions. She is currently working on the forthcoming documentary about the Endurance22 expedition for National Geographic Documentary Films.

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