

SHACKLETON'S DREAM. FUCHS, HILLARY AND THE CROSSING OF ANTARCTICA. Stephen Haddelsey. 2012. Stroud: The History Press. 267p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 978-0-7524-5926-4. £20

Just over a century ago, with the South Pole having been won, the overland crossing of Antarctica became the ultimate prize of polar exploration. However, it took almost five decades before a team of 12 men, led by British geologist Dr. Vivian Fuchs and assisted by a New Zealand support party led by Sir Edmund Hillary, completed the epic journey. Fuchs' party had travelled over 2000 miles in 99 days arriving at Scott Base, Ross Island on 2 March 1958 in their battered orange Sno-Cats. In his new book, *Shackleton's dream*, Stephen Haddelsey brings the nearly-forgotten Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition (TAE) back onto centre stage. As an outsider, Haddelsey has taken full advantage of hitherto unpublished material gleaned from personal diaries and interviews with surviving TAE members. The account has been thoroughly researched with over 1000 references and enlightens us on many issues that, not surprisingly, are missing from the official expedition book *The crossing of Antarctica* (Fuchs and Hillary 1958). Haddelsey brings the expedition to life with revealing anecdotes and a generous use of quotations from expedition members. For those unfamiliar with Antarctic exploration the introductory chapter is most useful with reference to earlier explorers from Shackleton and Filchner to the young Gino Watkins. The lead up to the TAE and the pivotal roles of James Wordie (veteran of Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition) and Sir Miles Clifford including the rivalry of Duncan Carse as leader, and the opposition of the Foreign Office to the whole idea of TAE remind us that success in projects of this magnitude can never be taken for granted.

Both the advance voyage of the *Theron* and the weeks during which Fuchs and Hillary were approaching the pole are especially fascinating. Readers from both Britain and New Zealand will find a balanced treatment of their respective leader's actions with sufficient evidence to make their own decision as to whether those actions were justified. Hillary's candid diary gives valuable insight into the thoughts that were occupying him throughout the TAE and importantly during his 'dash to the pole'. Fuchs' diary is also referenced. However Fuchs, in keeping with his restrained personality, was more cautious in expressing his emotions on paper. Team members were not so circumspect. One of Fuchs' party relates his dissatisfaction with the leadership commenting on the '...arrogance, the know-all attitude, the secrecy of decisions (or lack of them) ...', while Hillary's deputy accuses his leader of '...selfishness and personal ambition'. The rigours of the Antarctic exposed the human frailties and questionable decisions of both men as they doggedly pursued their separate, sometimes conflicting agendas.

One unfortunate aspect of the TAE, highlighted by George Lowe in the book, was that prior to arriving on opposite sides of the continent the UK and New Zealand teams were not given an opportunity to forge themselves into a single unit with

commonly understood objectives. It was only during the *Theron* trip that a few of the UK and New Zealand team members met each other before Fuchs' party arrived at Scott Base two years later, by which time most of the New Zealand party had left for home. Had more early interaction been possible much of the controversy and ill-feeling that was generated during the expedition might have been avoided. Had more empathy existed between the two leaders Fuchs might have welcomed the fact that Hillary had made so much progress so quickly with his diminutive Ferguson tractors and then might have explicitly encouraged Hillary to perform further reconnaissance and even to go all the way to the pole. The London committee was later forced to admit that at least the incident had generated publicity for the TAE that had otherwise been sorely lacking. We are now left with the difficult task of reading Fuchs' mind since his diary reveals little of his personal feelings. Unlike Hillary, Fuchs did not feel it necessary to write a personal account of his TAE experience. An unfortunate aspect is that the book does not sufficiently recognise the important role played by Commonwealth countries in the success of the expedition particularly as one of the key objectives of the TAE was to demonstrate solidarity within the devolving Empire. It is unlikely that Britain would have undertaken the traverse without that support. The author's account of how Scott Base (not 'Scott') was originally sited at Butter Point and then finally Pram Point needs clarification as it was Fuchs himself who advised that a site near Butter Point should be selected. He had originally intended to descend from the polar plateau down the Ferrar Glacier. This route would give him the longest run across the plateau for his seismic programme. In addition, the Ferrar had been traversed by Scott during his *Discovery* expedition of 1901–1903. (Frank Debenham, who knew the area well, had even suggested the Dailey Islands as a base site but this option was eliminated following the New Zealand reconnaissance party trip in 1955–1956.)

The book includes many previously unpublished TAE photographs with colour slides printed in black and white. The purist might object but it does lend consistency and enhances the historical feel for the reader. Maps are well utilised and clearly describe the major routes taken by the parties although a depiction of Shackleton's route through the Weddell Sea would have provided an interesting comparison to the route of *Theron*. The routes of the New Zealand sledging parties would also have been of some interest. Two important books omitted from the bibliography are *New Zealand and the Antarctic* (Quartermain 1971) and *Hellbent for the pole* (Martin 2007). These provide further insight and photographs of the TAE.

As Haddelsey points out, both Fuchs and Hillary made mistakes. Neither leader comes out with reputation unscathed as each was obsessed with his own objectives. Fuchs' major achievement was to overcome the obstacles to TAE in Britain and get the expedition to the starting line, a process that took seven years. Hillary's achievement was that he prevailed over the cautious and conservative views of his Ross Sea committee and, by expanding on his original mandate, succeeded in establishing New Zealand's permanent presence in Antarctica. Such

is the legacy of the TAE that there will always be debate over its usefulness and, of secondary interest, over Hillary's decision to continue on to the pole. It is a credit to Haddelsey that he ably leads us through the complex labyrinth of events and has given us a stimulating, solidly-researched perspective on a fascinating piece of Antarctic history. *Shackleton's dream* fills a significant gap in the record of polar exploration and should be included in every geographer's library. As he rightly concludes the TAE represented '...one of the most extraordinary and successful exploratory enterprises of the twentieth century'. (Stephen Hicks, Gateway Antarctica, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand.)

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