

PUTTING SOUTH GEORGIA ON THE MAP.

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In these days of artificial adventure played out before cameras, it is refreshing to read about an expedition that could achieve its objective only in a very adventurous way; in which contact with the outside world was made not by bouncing signals off a satellite but by lighting a fire to (hopefully) attract someone's attention.

In 1950, the subantarctic island of South Georgia had not been mapped, despite having been under British management for 40 years. Mapping is motivated by economic or military benefit. There was no military requirement at South Georgia until some 30 years later, and the economy of the island lay in maritime industries. Whalers and sealers did not penetrate inland, so the coasts of the island had been charted but the interior not mapped. Ernest Shackleton famously made the first crossing of the island using an outline chart that gave little indication of the interior.

The story of how South Georgia was put on the map is part of the story of one man's Antarctic dream. For Britons of a certain age, Duncan Carse will be known as the voice of *Dick Barton: Special Agent* in the BBC radio thriller series, but this occupied less than two of his 90 years' life. He should be remembered as a determined explorer. He served as a seaman on RRS *Discovery II* engaged in oceanographic work in the Southern Ocean and then transferred in November 1934 to *Penola*, the expedition ship of the British Graham Land Expedition, wintering aboard in Antarctica.

From this experience Carse developed a 'Master Plan' to cross the Antarctic continent, and succeed where Shackleton and Filchner had failed. After the war, he abandoned an assured career in the BBC and joined 'Duggie' Mason and Kevin Walton to organise a polar expedition. Brian Roberts at the Scott Polar Research Institute suggested mapping the interior of South Georgia and so the South Georgia Survey 1951–1952 came into being. Mason dropped out, Walton had to concentrate on a new job, so Carse was left to do most of the organising and assumed leadership. Carse's hope was that the expedition would help him win support for his trans-Antarctic quest.

In the event, there were three South Georgia Survey (SGS) expeditions: 1951–1952, 1953–1954 and 1955–1956. Although Carse returned to the island to complete the work in 1956–1957, he never counted this as one of the South Georgia Surveys. Meanwhile, Vivian Fuchs' plan for the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition had been preferred to Carse's more ambitious plan and his dream did not get farther south than South Georgia.

Carse had started to write an account of the South Georgia Surveys but had not proceeded far before his death in 2004. So Alec Trendall took over and contacted most of the survivors of the expeditions, receiving encouragement from Carse's widow, Venetia, and collaborator, Sally Poncet. He soon realised that 'the story of the South Georgia Surveys and the story of Duncan's life were so closely interwoven that they formed a single fabric: it made no sense to tell them separately'.

The bulk of the book describes the progress of the three expeditions, with the account of the first being provided by Walter Roots. Trendall was on this expedition but dislocated his knee falling 180ft down a bergschrund. It took five days to sledge him down to the coast where a fire was lit to attract the attention of people across the bay at King Edward Point.

There are very detailed narrative accounts of each expedition's progress around the mountains and glaciers of South Georgia. These are enlivened with excerpts from the men's diaries that give vivid descriptions of the conditions they experienced and the resulting frustrations. They add to the picture of trying to carry out very exacting working in a very beautiful but very unforgiving part of the world.

As anyone who knows South Georgia would expect, work was severely hampered by the changeable weather and progress was much slower than planned. 'Duncan called us out to do a base line station on Ross Pass but by the time we were on the way mist had again descended. Returned to camp' (page 146). Or sometimes not so changeable: 'A blizzard of gale-force winds, drifting snow and temperatures about 10° below freezing then kept us in our tents for ten days' (page 57). There were also the moments of drama, the greatest coming at the end of the third expedition when the team split in two for the day. Three men went Surveying while the remaining five moved camp. The weather deteriorated to mist and drift. The Surveyors were lucky to make it back to the tents; the sledgers spent the night in a crevasse, each group fearing for the safety of the other. Eventually, and in ignorance of each other's situation, both parties reached the safety of the whaling station at Husvik. Incongruously, the second party was met by a helicopter (from the factory ship *Southern Venturer*). 'At this moment Stan shouts: 'A helicopter! Look! It's looking for us.' This is so authentically Dick Barton that it just cannot be true' (page 171).

The diary extracts also contain scathing remarks about Carse's leadership: 'strength and pride eaten away by drink at the age of 42, poor old man' (page 158). He even referred to himself as a flawed leader; not the first in the annals of Antarctic exploration. But Trendall makes it clear 'that criticisms of Carse, and sometimes of each other, that are made in expedition diaries, reflect irritations of the moment rather than serious personal antipathies' (page 176). Flawed he may have been, but South Georgia would not have been mapped at that time without Duncan Carse's sustained determination over several years, despite many setbacks and the disappointment of losing the Trans-Antarctic expedition.

The outcome of the South Georgia Surveys was DOS 610, the first accurately Surveyed map of South Georgia, published at 1:200,000 in 1958 and only recently superseded by one based on satellite imagery. As Carse wrote: 'this last of the South Georgia Surveys will almost certainly be the last expedition of its kind' (page 188). Maps are easier to make now.

Duncan Carse returned to South Georgia in 1960, his Trans-Antarctic ambitions now far behind him, for an 'experiment in solitude'. That ended in near-disaster when a surge wave demolished his hut. Two more visits, in the summers of 1972–1973 and 1973–1974, identified Cave Cove where Shackleton had landed in 1916 but an attempt to trace Shackleton's route across the island in 1916 was terminated by bad weather before Carse had got far inland.

In contrast to many self-published books, Trendall has lavished care on the illustrations. Good quality paper helps and he has made an interesting choice of photos. Some show their age but this imparts an air of authenticity. They not only illustrate the country that was being Surveyed, one of the world's great scenic places, but the activities of the Surveyors. They are provided with informative captions, and the photographs are unusual for illustrating some of the more exciting moments of an expedition: Tom Price hauled out of a crevasse, Alec Trendall carried off the mountain after falling down the bergschrund, and a loaded sledge after it had run off on its own for 3km

and come to grief among rocks. Not surprisingly, the maps are also of high quality; in so many books they are frustratingly poor, but Trendall has included large, well-reproduced maps which enable the reader to follow the itineraries of the Survey parties.

Everyone with an interest in the history of the Antarctic regions, and of South Georgia in particular, should be grateful to Alec Trendall for making such a good job of ensuring that the story of Duncan Carse and the South Georgia Surveys is told. (Robert Burton, 63 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Huntingdon, PE28 9AW.)