

FOREWORD

At no time since the Antarctic continent was first discovered have so many nations taken a simultaneous interest in its exploration. Announcements of exploratory, whaling and other expeditions from no less than twelve countries have recently been made.

A preliminary account of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey is published in this number of *The Polar Record*. The Survey originated in 1943 as a naval operation. Since the end of the war it has been administered by the Government of the Falkland Islands. The work of this survey, continued over a number of years, should yield particularly useful results. So often in the past expeditions have come to the point where their most valuable and interesting work could be done just when they have had to return home. The same individuals can rarely remain in the Antarctic for more than two or three years at a stretch. The establishment of permanent or semi-permanent bases, accessible each summer to relief ships, affords the conditions needed for a long-term programme of survey and scientific research by providing a regular means of changing staff and replenishing stores. The Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey is the first occasion on which such a plan has been applied to Antarctica, and its progress will be followed with keen interest.

Commander Finn Ronne, who has had Antarctic experience with Admiral Byrd, has recently sailed with a party of twenty men and three aircraft for the same region. He intends to use the old "East Base" huts of the United States Antarctic Service Expedition of 1939-41. These huts are on the same island as the southern base of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, and a few miles from the southern base built by the British Graham Land Expedition in 1936.

The United States task force, of thirteen naval ships and over 4000 men, which has sailed for the Antarctic under the command of Rear-Admiral R. E. Byrd and Rear-Admiral Richard Cruzen, is in logical sequence to the series of naval, military and air exercises in the Arctic to which reference is made in this number of *The Polar Record*. The greater part of this expedition will spend only the summer season in Antarctic waters, carrying out a programme in which operational, reconnaissance and mapping flights will play a prominent part. It is reported that a shore base may be established, probably at "Little America" on the Ross Shelf Ice, to accommodate a small party over a period of at least eighteen months.

Sir Douglas Mawson has for long been advocating renewed Australian participation in Antarctic research. The Commonwealth Government have recently announced their intention to proceed as soon as possible with plans for the further exploration of the Australian Antarctic Territory. The New Zealand Government are also considering the possibility of dispatching an expedition to the Ross Dependency.

South African interest is indicated by the formation in 1944 of an Antarctic Research Committee which has selected a geologist to join the staff of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey this year.

The Argentine Government have dispatched a naval transport which is to be assisted by three other ships. This expedition plans to relieve the Argentine meteorological station on Laurie Island in the South Orkneys and to establish a second meteorological station in west Graham Land. The Chilean Government are also sending a naval vessel to visit the west coast of Graham Land during the present southern summer.

Plans are being considered for a British-Norwegian-Swedish expedition to the western part of Queen Maud Land. This region was photographed from the air by the German expedition of 1938-39 and named by them "Neu-Schwabenland". Their photographs disclose a large area of ice- and snow-bare ground enclosed by local glaciers and set in the inland ice. The object of the new expedition is to carry out scientific investigations in an area which promises scope for particularly interesting glaciological and climatological work. This expedition will require carefully co-ordinated planning, and is unlikely to set out until 1948 or 1949. British participation is being discussed by a joint Committee of the Royal Geographical Society and the Scott Polar Research Institute.

In addition to these expeditions, whaling fleets from the United Kingdom, Norway, the United States, the Netherlands, Russia and Japan have sailed this season for the Antarctic. These fleets comprise fifteen floating factories with their attendant catchers. Whale-catchers are also operating from three land stations in South Georgia.

This unprecedented activity on the part of so many different nations has naturally aroused widespread interest and considerable speculation. It is not altogether surprising that certain newspaper reports have assumed a somewhat sensational character. The purpose of these expeditions has been depicted as an international race for uranium ores. Such reports are symptomatic of the extent to which atomic energy dominates popular imagination. Since, however, uranium ores are very rare and none has yet been discovered in the Antarctic, a continent so largely covered by snow and ice would scarcely seem to be a promising place to look for them. The search for uranium ores has in fact little to do with the present activities. The motive in many cases is evidently connected with the establishment or strengthening of territorial claims. This may be regretted by those whose interest in the Polar Regions is primarily scientific, but the present activities, apart from providing opportunities for exploration and research which would not have existed otherwise, may hasten the time when some final political agreement may be reached.

The principal requirements for scientific exploration may be stated simply: freedom of access to the region which it is desired to investigate, time for adequate preparation, enough money to carry out the programme, and a free interchange of plans, ideas and results with explorers and scientists of any nationality.

The present expeditions—having government backing—afford the advantages of financial support, transport facilities and equipment on a scale beyond the dreams of pre-war explorers. Many of the scientists, however, are recruited at the eleventh hour and have insufficient opportunity to make adequate preparations before leaving home, and they are often unable to collaborate as freely as they would like with their colleagues in other countries. As soon as an agreement on the territorial issues has been reached the way should become clear for full international collaboration.

There have been many inquiries at the Institute about the possibility of summer expeditions to the Arctic. There are peculiar difficulties in the way of organising such expeditions this year. The authorities dealing with some of these northern lands are overburdened with responsibilities arising from the war, and cannot be expected to consider additional commitments. Shortages of food and equipment must also handicap the efficient organisation of Arctic expeditions at the present time. Interest in polar exploration is probably greater than was ever the case before the war. Although it may not be possible for such enthusiasm to find an immediate outlet, it is satisfactory to know that with more favourable circumstances there will be no lack of men with the enterprise and enthusiasm essential to successful exploration.

The Reverend W. L. S. Fleming, Fellow, Dean and Chaplain of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, has been appointed to succeed Professor F. Debenham as Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute. Mr Fleming was Chaplain and Geologist of the British Graham Land Expedition of 1934–37, following work with the Cambridge Iceland Expedition of 1932 and with the Oxford University Arctic Expedition to Spitsbergen in 1933.

Mr J. G. Elbo has been given a temporary appointment to work in the Institute as Scandinavian Translator. Miss D. M. Johnson has been appointed Librarian.

The Royal Geographical Society arranged a Polar Exhibition which was on view in the Society's House from the middle of December 1946. The exhibition includes equipment, relics, prints and pictures illustrating famous Polar journeys, and special cold climate equipment developed by the three Services during the war. The arrangement was in part regional but was also designed to illustrate the development of the character and technique of polar exploration from earliest times until the present day.

A considerable rise in printing costs has obliged the Editorial Committee to increase the price of *The Polar Record* to 3s. 6d. for each number. This increase will take effect with the publication of the next number.

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