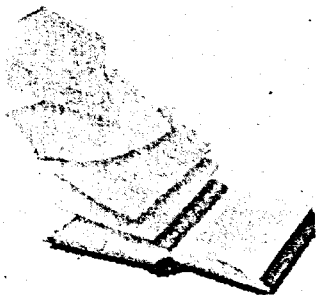




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The public perception of him was as Admiral of the frozen lands and seas, not as a Virginian aristocrat living on Boston's historic Beacon Hill. His was a complex and many-faceted personality, but he was no scientist and never claimed to be one. He became the supreme organiser and a visionary who made a continent nearly safe for those who followed him there.

His flights over the Atlantic and the Poles led some to consider him a stuntman, but he outgrew his propensity for headline grabbing and adopted scientific and geographic contributions as his objectives. In mid-career a major personal objective was delineating the longest stretch of unknown coast on earth, east of Marie Byrd Land. His solitary winter at Advance Base, which some interpreted as showmanship, yielded an

invaluable unbroken meteorological record, despite illness and hazards.

The second Byrd expedition formed the historic dividing line between dog teams, wooden ships and iron men and the modern era. Byrd's successful adaptation of mechanical air and land transport started the trend to prolonged research cruises, permanent bases and aircraft-delivered supplies. Although a non-governmental project, BAE 2 was quite equivalent in the public mind with the Apollo space programme of the next generation.

The Antarctic Continent is now by far the largest area on the planet dedicated as an international scientific reserve and peace park. It was the work of Byrd and his multi-national associates in the Antarctic, which, in large measure made this outcome possible.

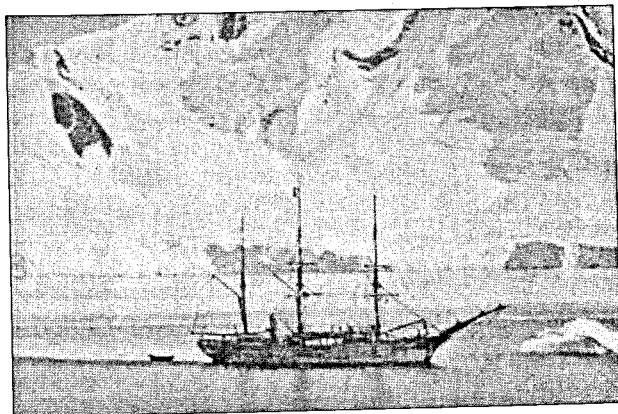
HISTORICAL

THE RIDDLE OF THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA

By David E. Yelverton FRGS. Part I: Pioneers of the Antarctic Night: The Story of the Belgian Antarctic Expedition 1897-9.

Adrien de Gerlache de Gomery, a young Belgian naval lieutenant, had campaigned for years for a Belgian Antarctic Expedition. Smitten with antarctic fever in the 1880's he had obtained his first backer in 1894 and, like Roald Amundsen, sailed with Greenland whalers the following year to gain experience in ice-infested waters. Returning in the wake of the 1895 International Geographical Congress in London he had won the backing of the Royal Belgian Geographical Society, and by the following summer got promises of £3,000

from the public, plus £4,000 from the government, but no actual cash. Taking out a sizeable loan (£2,700) he set off to acquire and modify a Norwegian whaler, a task that took him a year. But public support was as thin as it was to be for the British and German expeditions that would only be viably funded four years later. In the end De Gerlache, as the world better knows him, was only able to sail in August 1897 because at the last moment his government increased its grant to more than half the eventual £11,900 cost of the expedition.(a) See notes on page 153.



Belgica in Neumayer channel below Mt. William. (Schepens, Brussels 1904)

Owing to the poor season he bought the whaler *Patria* for a small amount which he had first encountered off Greenland.

Accompanied by Lt. Emile Danco, released from the artillery to act as magnetician, he remained in Norway to supervise the overhaul and modification of the ship at the Christensen wharf at Sandefjord, including a new boiler and propeller, along with installation of laboratories and the oceanographic gear donated by the Danish Navy at the instigation of Cdr Christian Wandel, their Hydrographer. When work stopped for the winter, de Gerlache took time off from his heavy schedule of correspondence to learn ski and snow-shoe use.

Guided and advised by Arctic explorers Nansen, Sverdrup, Johansen and the Austrian Count Weyprecht (of the Tegethoff Expedition), he had the ship ready by June

1897, renamed her *Belgica* and, after visits from Sir Clements Markham and Nansen, sailed from Sandefjord on the 26th with Danco and his newest volunteer Amundsen, along with two mechanics and four sailors.(b)

After picking up instruments and supplies at Frederikshavn in the north of Denmark, a rough 4-day voyage brought them to

Vlissingen (Flushing) where Lt. Georges Lecointe, just released at De Gerlache's request to be second-in-command, met the ship on 2 July. Lecointe found the company totally exhausted, no one having slept at all during the voyage, or eaten for twenty-four hours because the trip had taken longer than expected. The next day they moved up the Schelde and anchored at Antwerp.

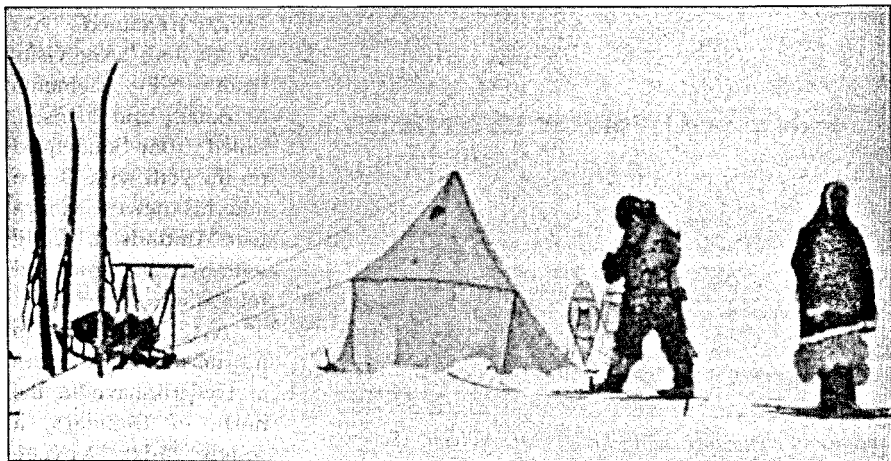
Faced with fund-raising diversions to



De Gerlache



Lecointe



Cooks tent, showing Amundsen's and Lecointe's skis and Cooks snowshoes.
(Schepens, Brussels 1904)

the last, De Gerlache could only assemble the remaining scientists from volunteers prepared to contribute rather than be paid. Emile-Georges Racovitza (29), a Rumanian, was accepted as zoologist and botanist; Henryk Arctowski (26), of Polish origin, would take charge of geology, oceanography and weather observations, and Louis Bernacchi (21), working at the Melbourne Observatory since 1895, would join as physicist for the second season. A young Polish student Antoine Dobrowolski, who volunteered to join without pay, was accepted as assistant meteorologist.

De Gerlache then had to find engineers and crew. He and Lecointe would sail with no powers of discipline or legal crew agreements as assisted the smooth running of a ship under British mercantile law. In the end, the heterogeneous crew De Gerlache did get together, "undisciplined and even dangerous". They were barely adequate, and even

less so controllable, though the worst deserted during preparations at Antwerp. Such was the nature of the locally recruited men that when Lecointe proposed exercises in manoeuvring the ship before leaving Antwerp for the better safety of all, De Gerlache had to decline because he knew his men would refuse any work outside this normal duties without extra payment.

The five Norwegian sailors that De Gerlache had taken on understood commands from 2nd Mate Amundsen, and De Gerlache had picked up some of their language. But the rest conversed in French. When the doctor withdrew, the problem was only resolved by the fortuitous arrival of a telegram from Dr. Frederick Cook (32) of Brooklyn, lately on Peary's first North Greenland expedition, who offered to contribute if he could join. De Gerlache cabled him to join them in Rio. Cook only spoke English and a smattering of German, so a third language was added which only

De Gerlache and 3rd Mate Jules Mélaerts could understand.

All was finally ready by 16 August, and after a grand official send-off and the playing of the national anthem, the 35 metre whaler, dressed overall, sailed at last amid a myriad yachts and sounding of sirens, only to have the boiler water pump break down once she was out to sea.

Putting back into Ostend, already a month behind schedule, King Leopold II who had hitherto held aloof from the expedition, came aboard without advance warning to inspect everything with minute interest, and addressed the whole company — some slight compensation for their troubles to date, but of no avail in stemming further crew problems which were to break out twice more before they reached the Antarctic.

One of the mechanics fell sick, and both the bosun and carpenter resigned because sailors were continually going ashore without leave. To replace them De Gerlache managed to get only two seamen from Antwerp.(c) The working complement, excluding the scientists, was just 19 comprising De Gerlache, the 3 officers, 2 engineers, steward, cook, 2 mechanics, and 9 sailors, of whom Tollefsen, the oldest Norwegian, was appointed bosun.

On the evening of 23 August, having waited for three days for winds to abate, they weighed anchor and lurched into the roughest of channel seas behind a tug, only feeling it safe to cast off when they were near the Isle of Wight. The weather remained tempestuous for ten days, so that they didn't reach Madeira until 11 September.

Sailing again on the 14th, De

Gerlache and Amundsen began to sort out the supplies and equipment to be landed at Cape Adare, for the plan was to use the southern summer of 1897-8 to explore southward in Weddell's tracks, and then sail to South Victoria Land to land De Gerlache, Amundsen, Danco and Arctowski to winter at the Cape and explore inland. The ship would re-provision at Melbourne and then pick them up early in 1899 after carrying out oceanographic work in the Pacific.

Taking five more weeks to reach Rio, where they picked up the enthusiastic Dr. Cook and enjoyed eight days of receptions and festivities, the *Belgica* did not reach Punta Arenas in the Magellan Straits until 1 December.

At Montevideo De Gerlache had had to sack the cook and, with near-fatal consequences later on, the Swedish replacement he took on fell ill the day they sailed and had to be put ashore at Punta Arenas. An ex-foreign legionnaire steward, Michotte, volunteered to take on the job. Within three days of arriving at the Chilean port, fresh trouble broke out and a chaotic period ended with De Gerlache bringing an armed police detachment aboard. When this news reached Europe, it reinforced Markham's conviction that the expedition should have been a naval one. (Two Belgian sailors and one of the mechanics were dismissed.)

About to plunge into the unknown, De Gerlache was left with a working complement of just 14, excluding Danco, Cook, Racovitza, Arctowski and the young Dobrowolski.(d)

They were at least five weeks late and the deck crew was dangerously small and inexperienced, four of them novices

ANTARCTIC JOURNEYS 1898 - 1905

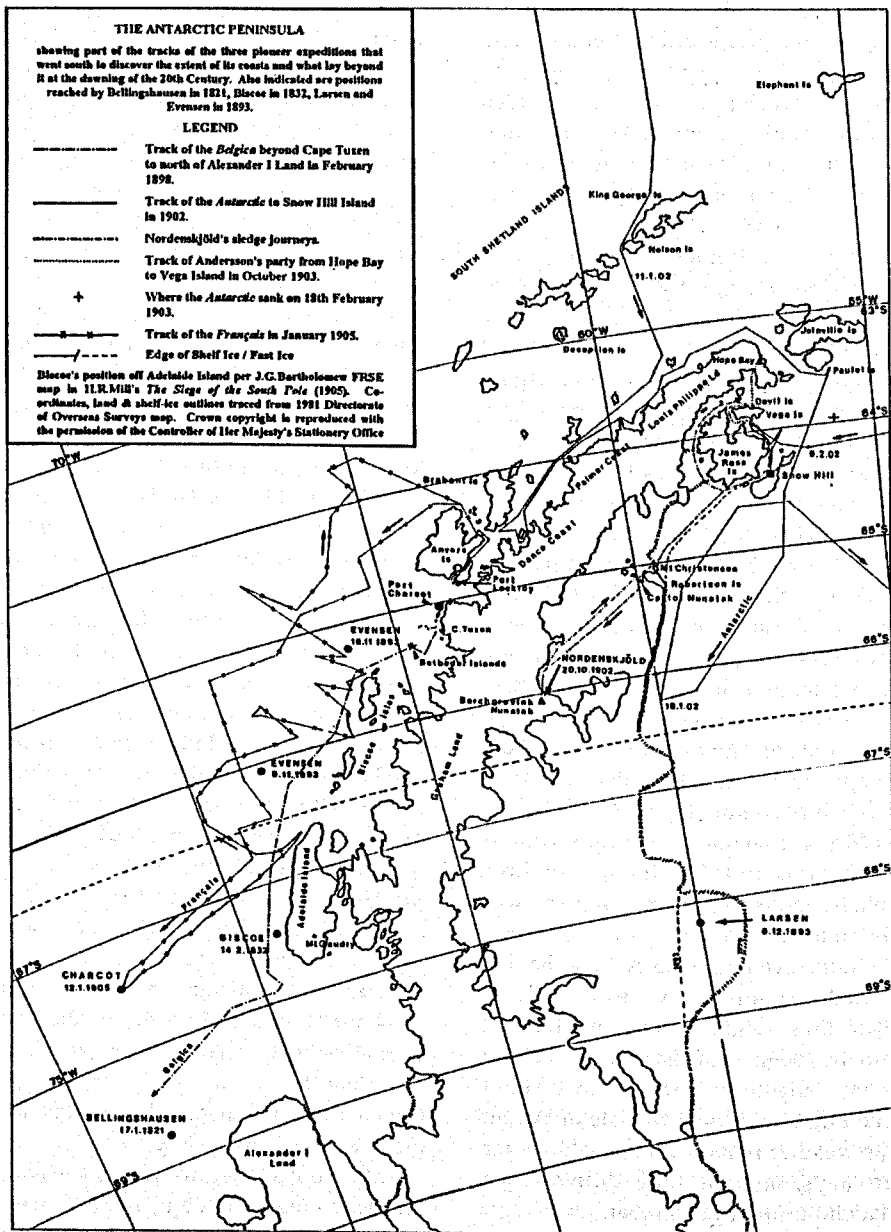
THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA

showing part of the tracks of the three pioneer expeditions that went south to discover the extent of its coasts and what lay beyond it at the dawn of the 20th Century. Also indicated are positions reached by Bellingshausen in 1821, Blace in 1832, Larsen and Eymann in 1893.

LEGEND

- Track of the *Belgica* beyond Cape Tuxen to north of Alexander I Land in February 1898.
- Track of the *Antarctic* to Snow Hill Island in 1902.
- Nordenfjöld's sledge journeys.
- Track of Anderson's party from Hope Bay to Vega Island in October 1903.
- +
- Where the *Antarctic* sank on 18th February 1903.
- Track of the *François* in January 1905.
- Edge of Shelf Ice / Fast Ice

Blace's position off Adelaide Island per J.G. Bartholomew FRSE map in H.R. Mill's *The Siege of the South Pole* (1905). Coordinates, land & shelf-ice outlines traced from 1981 Directorate of Overseas Surveys map. Crown copyright is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office



21 years old or less, with only Tollefsen and Johansen to hold each watch together. It was only safe to sail further by virtue of the ship being equipped with Cunningham's patent furling topsails, which could be handled entirely from the deck without sending men aloft at all.

On top of this, De Gerlache had been faced with the need to accept offers of fresh meat and coal (despite picking up 100 tons shipped out from Belgium), and so had been forced to make a diversion through the difficult Beagle Channel to pick the meat up at Punta Arenas. It was clearly impossible to get to Victoria Land that season, so De Gerlache decided they could only visit Hughes Bay and try to get through from there to the Weddell Sea, going on afterwards to reach Melbourne in May, and stopping there for the winter. They would then land at Cape Adare the following season — it would all take no longer in total than the original plan envisaged, but the wintering on the Cape would have to be abandoned. (e)

Unknown to them, Sir Clements Markham had made the first announcement in London of Borchgrevink's expedition to the same place De Gerlache's party was aiming for — Cape Adare. After failing to get Nansen's support in his homeland, Borchgrevink had persuaded London publisher Sir George Newnes to back his expedition with almost three times the amount De Gerlache had raised for the Belgian expedition.

Leaving Punta Arenas on 13 Dec 1897, the diversion through the Magellan Straits and back had cost De Gerlache a month. They had taken on

NOTES

(a) £1500 would be recovered by sale of the ship.

(b) Lecointe (*Au Pays des Manchots* p19) refers to 4 sailors, but De Gerlache (*Quinze Mois dans l'Antarctique* p71) lists 5 Norwegians, one of which, Adam Tollefsen, is referred to as bosun by Lecointe p88.

(c) Gaston Dufour and Jean Van Mirlo, the latter assigned as apprentice mechanic.

(d) The working complement comprised De Gerlache (31), Lecointe (28), 2nd Offr Roald Amundsen (26), 3rd Offr Jules Mélaerts (22), Ch. Engr Henri Somers (34), 2nd Engr Max van Rysselberghe (19), Mechanic Jan Van Mirlo (20), Steward & Cook Louis Michotte, bosun Adam Tollefsen (31), 4 Norwegian sailors Ludwig Hjalmar Johansen (25), Engelbret Knudsen (21), August Wiencke (20), Johan Koren (18) & 1 Belgian Gustave-Gaston Dufour (21).

(e) There is some doubt about this because Lecointe (p132-3) relates that the new plan was to return to S. America for the winter, then head for the Weddell Sea if they had found good prospects to the south or, if not, carryout the original S. Victoria Land plan. But it seems unlikely De Gerlache would have slowed the first voyage south to take soundings across the Drake Strait if he had been intending to return that way.

another 45 tons of coal, mostly stacked on deck, the beef carcasses which they hung in the shrouds and, on the last stretch through the channel fresh water, the gaining of which nearly cost them their lives. Trying to enter an uncharted bay in darkness the ship ran aground, and for many hours was in danger of being completely wrecked. But with the aid of local indians they got her floated off without serious damage.

At last on 14 Jan 1898 l'Expédition Antarctique Belge, so nearly finished before it really started, stood out into the South Atlantic and headed the ship's bow towards the South Shetlands and

the Antarctic beyond. The opening raid upon Nature's white wilderness had got off to a shaky start.

To be continued next issue

TRIBUTES

SIR ROBIN IRVINE 1929 — 1996 CHAIRMAN OF ANTARCTICA NEW ZEALAND

One of my great privileges was knowing Sir Robin Irvine for the last five years. He was a man of high ability and made a major and lasting impression on every venture that he was involved in. His final years were marked by a focus of his extraordinary energy on Antarctica.

In 1993 he was appointed Chairperson of the Ross Dependency Research Committee (RDRC). As a man of action he soon became frustrated by the lack of "teeth" that characterised the decisions of this nominally important committee. As a result he became the driving force in the establishment of the New Zealand Antarctic Institute which, under an Act of Parliament, would have responsibilities superseding those of the RDRC.

At the time of his death he was Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Antarctic Institute (named "Antarctica New Zealand"), Chairman of the Board of the International Centre for Antarctic Information and Research (ICAIR), Chairman of the Board of Mercy Hospital and Deputy Chairman of the Board of the Institute of Environmental Science and Research, as well as being a trustee of the Antarctic

Heritage Trust, the National Library, the New Zealand Red Cross Foundation and a member of several other nationally important academic and educational governing boards, and trustee committees.

Sir Robin was a medical scientist by training and after several appointments in New Zealand and the UK he was appointed clinical Dean of the Medical School at the University of Otago in 1969. In 1973 he became Vice Chancellor of the University of Otago, the youngest appointment of this nature by the University this century. He held this post until 1993 when he became actively involved in Antarctica.

He was a tireless communicator and rapidly increased the profile of New Zealand's Antarctic programme in international affairs. Already strong links with the US Antarctic programme and with the British Antarctic Survey were enhanced and in particular he was very pleased to be given the opportunity to develop, for the first time, links with South Africa's National Antarctic Research Programme. At the time of his death New Zealand's Antarctic interests have seldom looked stronger: increases in government science funding for