HOW I FOUND THE SOUTH POLE

BY CAPTAIN ROALD AMUNDSEN

After a Month Spent in Equipping the Fram and in Parting Festivities, Including a Visit from the King and Queen of Norway, the Stanch Little Polar Ship Sails on Her Way to the South on a Scientific Cruise.

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THE month of May, 1910, ran its course, beautiful as only a spring month in Norway can be—a lovely dream of verdure and flowers. But unfortunately we had little time to admire all the splendor that surrounded us; our watchword was "Away—away from beautiful sights, as quickly as possible."

From the beginning of the month the Fram lay moored to her buoy outside the old walls of Akershus. Fresh and trim she came from the yard at Horten; you could see the shine on her new paint a long way off. Involuntarily one thought of holidays and yachting tours at the sight of her; but the thought was soon banished. The first day after her arrival the vessel's deck assumed the most everyday appearance that could be desired; the loading had begun.

A long procession of cases of provisions made its way unceasingly from the basement of the Historical Museum down into the roomy hold of the Fram, where Lieutenant Nilsen and three Nordlanders were ready to receive them.

This process was not an altogether simple one; on the contrary, it was a very serious affair.

It was not enough to know that all the cases were duly on board; the problem was to know exactly where each particular case was placed, and, at the same time, to stow them all in such a way that they could easily be got at in future.

This was a difficult piece of work, and it was not rendered any more easy by the attention that had to be paid to the numerous hatches leading down into the lower hold, where the big petroleum tanks stood. All these hatches had to be left accessible, otherwise we should have been cut off from pumping the oil into the engine-room.

However, Nilsen and his assistants accomplished their task with brilliant success. Among the hundreds of cases there was not one that was misplaced; not one that was stowed so that it could not instantly be brought into the light of day.

While the provisioning was going on the rest of the equipment was also being taken on board. Each member of the expedition was busily engaged in looking after the needs of his own department in the best way possible. Nor was this a question of trifles; one may cudgel one's brains endlessly in advance, but some new requirement will constantly be cropping up—until one puts a full stop to it by casting off and sailing. This event was becoming imminent with the arrival of June.

The day before leaving Christiania we had the honor and pleasure of receiving a visit from the King and Queen of Norway on board the Fram. Having been informed beforehand of their majesties' coming, we endeavored as far as possible to bring some order into the chaos that reigned on board. I do not know that we were particularly successful, but I am sure that every one of the Fram's crew will always remember with respectful gratitude King Haakon's cordial words of farewell.

On the same occasion the expedition received from their majesties the gift of a beautiful silver jug, which afterward formed the most handsome ornament of our table on every festive occasion.

On June 3, early in the forenoon, the Fram left Christiania, bound at first for my home on Bundefjord. The object of her call there was to take on board the house for the winter station, which stood ready built in the garden.

Our excellent carpenter, Jorgen Stubberud, had superintended the construction of this strong building. It was now rapidly taken to pieces, and every single plank and beam was carefully numbered. We had quite an imposing pile of material to get aboard, where even before there was not much room to spare. The bulk of it was stowed forward, and the remainder in the hold.

The more experienced among the members of the expedition were evidently absorbed in profound conjecture as to the meaning of this "observation house," as the newspapers had christened it. It may willingly be admitted that they had good reason for their speculations. By an observation house is usually meant a comparatively simple construction, sufficient to provide the necessary shelter from wind and weather. Our house, on the other hand, was a model of solidity, with three double walls, double roof and floor.

Its arrangements included 10 inviting bunks, a kitchen and a table; the latter, moreover, had a brand-new American-cloth cover. "I can understand that they want to keep themselves warm when they're making observations," said Helmer Hanssen; "but what they want with a cloth on the table I can't make out."

On the afternoon of June 6 it was announced that everything was ready, and in the evening we all assembled at a simple farewell supper in the garden. I took the opportunity of wishing good luck to every man in turn, and finally we united in a

"God preserve the King and Fatherland!"

Then we broke up. The last man to get into the boat was the second in command; he arrived armed with a horseshoe. In his opinion it is quite incredible what luck an old horseshoe will bring. Possibly he is right. Anyhow, the horseshoe was firmly nailed to the mast in the Fram's saloon, and there it still hangs.

When on board we promptly set to work to get up the anchor. The motor hummed, and the heavy cable rattled in through the hawse-hole. Precisely at midnight the anchor let go of the bottom, and just as the seventh of June rolled in over us the Fram stood out of Christiania Fjord for the third time. Twice already had a band of stout-hearted men brought this ship back with honor after years of service. Would it be vouchsafed to us to uphold this honorable tradition?

Such were, no doubt, the thoughts with which most of us were occupied as our vessel glided over the motionless fjord in the light summer night. The start was made under the sign of June 7, and this was taken as a promising omen; but among our bright and confident hopes there crept a shadow of melancholy.

The hillsides, the woods, the fjord—all were so bewitchingly fair and so dear to us. They called to us with their allurement, but the Diesel motor knew no pity. Its tuff-tuff went on brutally through the stillness. A little boat, in which were some of my nearest relations, dropped gradually astern. There was a glimpse of white handkerchiefs in the twilight, and then—farewell!

The next morning we were moored in the inner harbor at Horten. An apparently innocent lighter came alongside at once, but the lighter's cargo was not quite so innocent as its appearance. It consisted of no less than half a ton of guncotton and rifle ammunition, a somewhat unpleasant, but none the less necessary, item of our equipment.

Besides taking on board the ammunition, we availed ourselves of the opportunity of completing our water supply. When this was done we lost no time in getting away. As we passed the warships lying in the harbor they manned ship, and the bands played the national anthem.

Outside Vealos we had the pleasure of waving a last farewell to a man to whom the expedition will always owe a debt of gratitude, Captain Christian Blom, superintendent of the dockyard, who had supervised the extensive repairs to the Fram with unrelaxing interest and obligingness. He slipped past us in his sailing boat; I do not remember if he got a cheer. If he did not, it was a mistake.

Now we were on our way to the South, as the heading of this chapter announces, though not yet in earnest. We had an additional task before us, the oceanographical cruise in the Atlantic. This necessitated a considerable detour on the way. The scientific results of this cruise will be dealt with by specialists in due course; if it is briefly referred to here, this is chiefly for the sake of continuity.

After consultation with Professor Nansen the plan was to begin investigations in the region to the south of Ireland, and thence to work our way westward, as far as time and circumstances permitted. The work was to be resumed on the homeward voyage in the direction of the north of Scotland. For various reasons this program afterward had to be considerably reduced.

For the first few days after leaving Norway we were favored with the most splendid summer weather. The North Sea was as calm as a millpond, the Fram had little more motion than when she was lying in Bunderfjord.

This was all the better for us, as we could hardly be said to be absolutely ready for sea when we passed Faerder, and came into the capricious Skagerak. Hard pressed as we had been for time, it had not been possible to lash and stow the last of our cargo as securely as was desirable; a stiff breeze at the mouth of the fjord would therefore have been rather inconvenient.

As it was, everything was arranged admirably, but to do this we had to work night and day. I have been told that on former occasions seasickness made fearful ravages on board the Fram, but from this trial we also had an easy escape.

Nearly all the members of the expedition were used to the sea, and the few who, perhaps, were not so entirely proof against it had a whole week of fine weather to get into training. So far as I know, not a single case occurred of this unpleasant and justly dreaded complaint.

After passing the Dogger Bank we had a very welcome northeast breeze; with the help of the sails we could now increase the not every reckless speed that the motor was capable of accomplishing. Before we sailed the most contradictory accounts were current of the Fram's sailing qualities.

There were some who asserted that the ship could not be got through the water at all, while with equal force the contrary view was maintained—that she was a notable fast sailer.

As might be supposed, the truth as usual lay about half-way between the two extremes. The ship was no racer, nor was she an absolute log. We ran before the northeast wind toward the English Channel at a speed of about seven knots, and with that we were satisfied for the time being.

The important question for us was whether we should keep the favorable wind till we were well through the Straits of Dover, and, preferably, a good way down Channel. Our engine power was far too limited to make it of any use trying to go against the wind, and we should have been obliged in that case to have recourse to the sailing ship's method—beating.

Tacking in the English Channel—the busiest part of the world's seas—is in itself no very pleasant work; for us it would be so much the worse, as it would greatly encroach on the time that could be devoted to oceanographical investigations. But the east wind held with praiseworthy steadiness. In the course of a few days we were through the channel, and about a week after leaving Norway we were able to take the first oceanographical station at the point arranged according to the plan.

Hitherto everything had gone as smoothly as we could wish, but now, for a change, difficulties began to appear, first in the form of unfavorable weather. When the northwester begins to blow in the North Atlantic it is generally a good while before it drops again, and this time it did not belie its reputation. Far from getting to the westward, we were threatened for a time with being driven on to the Irish Coast. It was not quite so bad as that, but we soon found ourselves obliged to shorten the route originally laid down very considerably. A contributing cause of this determination was the fact that the motor was out of order.

Whether it was the fault of the oil or a defect in the engine itself our engineer was not clear. It was therefore necessary to make for home in good time, in case of extensive repairs being required. In spite of these difficulties, we had a quite respectable collection of samples of water and temperatures at different depths before we set our course for Norway at the beginning of July, with Bergen as our destination.

During the passage from Pentland Firth we had a violent gale from the north, which gave us an opportunity of experiencing how the Fram behaved in bad weather.

The trial was by no means an easy one. It was blowing a gale, with a cross sea; we kept going practically under full sail, and had the satisfaction of seeing our ship make over nine knots. In the rather severe rolling the collar of the mast in the forecabin was loosened a little; this let the water in, and there was a slight flooding of Lieutenant Nilsen's cabin and mine.

The others, whose berths were to port, were on the weather side, and kept dry. We came out of it all with the loss of a few boxes of cigars, which were wet through. They were not entirely lost for all that; Ronne took charge of them, and regaled himself with salt and moldy cigars for six months afterwards.

Going eight or nine knots an hour, we did not make much of the distance between Scotland and Norway. On the afternoon of Saturday, July 9, the wind dropped, and at the same time the lookout reported land in sight. This was Siggen on Bommelo. In the course of the night we came under the coast, and on Sunday morning, July 10, we ran into Saelbjornsfjord.

We had no detailed chart of the inlet, but after making a great noise with our powerful air-siren, we at last roused the inmates of the pilot station, and a pilot came aboard. He showed visible signs of surprise when he found out, by reading the name on the ship's side, that it was the Fram he had before him. "Lord, I thought you were a Russian!" he exclaimed. This supposition was presumably intended to serve as a sort of excuse for his small hurry in coming on board.

It was a lovely trip through the fjords to Bergen, as warm and pleasant in here as it had been bitter and cold outside. We had a dead calm all day, and with the four knots an hour, which was all the motor could manage, it was late in the evening when we anchored off the naval dockyard in Solheimsvik.

Our stay in Bergen happened at the time of the exhibition, and the committee paid the expedition the compliment of giving all its members free passes.

Business of one kind and another compelled me to go to Christiania, leaving the Fram in charge of Lieutenant Nilsen. They had their hands more than full on board. Dissel's firm in Stockholm sent their experienced fitter; Aspelund, who at once set to work to overhaul the motor thoroughly.

The work that had to be done was executed gratis by the Laxevaag engineering works. After going into the matter thoroughly it was decided to change the solar oil we had on board for refined petroleum.

Through the courtesy of the West of Norway Petroleum Company we got this done on very favorable terms at the company's steerage dock in Skaalevik. This was troublesome work, but it paid in the future.

The samples of water from our trip were taken to the biological station, where Kutschin at once went to work with the filtering (determination of the proportion of chlorine).

Our German shipmate, the oceanagrapher Schroer left us at Bergen. On July 23 the Fram left Bergen, and arrived on the following day at Christiansand, where I met her. Here we again had a series of busy days.

In one of the Customhouse warehouses were piled a quantity of things that had to go on board; no less than 400 bundles of dried fish, all our ski and sledging outfit, a wagonload of timber, etc. At Fredriksholm, out on Flekkero, we had found room for perhaps the most important of all—the passengers, the 97 Eskimo dogs, which had arrived from Greenland in the middle of July on the steamer Tans Tgede.

The ship had had a rather long and rough passage, and the dogs were not in very good condition on their arrival, but they had not been many days on the island under the supervision of Hassel and Lindstrom before they were again in full vigor. A plentiful supply of fresh meat worked wonders.

The usually peaceful island, with the remains of the old fortress, resounded day by day, and sometimes at night, with the most glorious concerts of howling. These musical performances attracted a number of inquisitive visitors, who were anxious to submit the members of the chorus to a closer examination, and, therefore, at certain times the public were admitted to see the animals.

It soon turned out that the majority of the dogs, far from being ferocious or shy, were, on the contrary, very appreciative of these visits. They sometimes came in for an extra titbit in the form of a sandwich or something of the sort. Besides which, it was a little diversion in their life of captivity, so uncongenial to an Arctic dog, for every one of them was securely chained up. This was necessary, especially to prevent fighting among themselves.

It happened not infrequently that one or more of them got loose, but the two guardians were always ready to capture the runaways. One enterprising rascal started to swim over the sound to the nearest land—the object of his expedition was undoubtedly certain unsuspecting sheep that were grazing by the shore—but his swim was interrupted in time.

After the Fram's arrival Wisting took over the position of dogkeeper in Hassel's place. He and Lindstrom staid close to the island where the dogs were. Wisting had a way of his own with his four-footed subjects, and was soon on a confidential footing with them. He also showed himself to be possessed of considerable veterinary skill—an exceedingly useful qualification in this case, where there was often some injury or other to be attended to.

As I have already mentioned, up to this time no member of the expedition, except Lieutenant Niisen, knew anything of the extension of plan that had been made. Therefore, among the things that came on board, and among the preparations that were made during our stay at Christiansand, there must have been a great deal that appeared very strange to those who, for the present, were only looking forward to a voyage round Cape Horn to San Francisco.

What was the object of taking all these dogs on board and transporting them all that long way? And if it came to that, would any of them survive the voyage round the formidable promontory? Besides, were there not dogs enough, and good dogs, too, in Alaska? Why was the whole after-deck full of coal? What was the use of all these planks and boards?

Would it not have been much more convenient to take all that kind of goods on board in Frisco? These and many similar questions began to pass from man to man; indeed, their very faces began to resemble notes of interrogation. Not that any one asked me—far from it; it was the second in command who had to bear the brunt and answer as well as he could—an extremely thankless and unpleasant task for a man who already had his hands more than full.

In order to relieve his difficult situation I resolved, shortly before leaving Christiansand, to inform Lieutenants Prestrud and Gjertsen of the true state of affairs. After having signed an undertaking of secrecy, they received full information of the intended dash to the South Pole, and an explanation of the reasons for keeping the whole thing secret. When asked whether they wished to take part in the new plan, they both answered at once in the affirmative, and that settled it.

There were now three men on board—all the officers—who were acquainted with the situation, and were thus in a position to parry troublesome questions and remove possible anxieties on the part of the uninitiated.

Two of the members of the expedition joined during the stay at Christiansand—Hasse and Lindstrom—and one change was made, the engineer Eliassen was discharged.

It was no easy matter to find a man who possessed the qualifications for taking over the post of engineer to the Fram. Few, or perhaps no one, in Norway could be expected to have much knowledge of motors of the size of ours.

The only thing to be done was to go to the place where the engine was built—to Sweden. Diesel's firm in Stockholm helped us out of the difficulty; they sent us the man, and it afterward turned out that he was the right man. Knut Sundbeck was his name. A chapter might be written on the good work that man did, and the quiet, unostentatious way in which he did it.

From the very beginning he had assisted in the construction of the Fram's motor, so that he knew the engine thoroughly. He treated it as his darling; therefore there was never anything the matter with it. It may truly be said that he did honor to his firm and the nation to which he belongs.

Meanwhile we were hard at work, getting ready to sail. We decided to leave before the middle of August—the sooner the better.

The Fram had been in dry dock, where the hull was thoroughly coated with composition. Heavily laden as the ship was, the false keel was a good deal injured by the severe pressure on the blocks, but with the help of a diver the damage was quickly made good.

The many hundred bundles of dried fish were squeezed into the main hold, full as it was. All sledging and ski outfit was carefully stowed away, so as to be protected as far as possible from damp. These things had to be kept dry, otherwise they would become warped and useless. Bjaaland had charge of this outfit, and he knew how it should be treated.

As is right and proper, when all the goods had been shipped, it was the turn of the passengers. The Fram was anchored off Fredriksholm, and the necessary preparations were immediately made for receiving our four-footed friends. Under the expert direction of Bjaaland and Stubberud, as many as possible of the crew were set to work with ax and saw, and in the course of a few hours the Fram had got a new deck.

This consisted of loose pieces of decking, which could easily be raised and removed for flushing and cleaning. This false deck rested on three-inch planks nailed to the ship's deck; between the latter and the loose deck there was therefore a considerable space, the object of which was a double one—namely, to let the water, which would unavoidably be shipped on such a voyage, run off rapidly and to allow air to circulate, and thus keep the space below the animals as cool as possible. The arrangement afterward proved very successful.

The bulwarks on the fore part of the Fram's deck consisted of an iron railing covered with wire netting. In order to provide both shade and shelter from the wind, a lining of boards was now put up along the inside of the railing, and chains were fastened in all possible and impossible places to tie the dogs up to.

There could be no question of letting them go loose—to begin with, at any rate; possibly we might hope to be able to set them free later on, when they knew their masters better and were more familiar with their surroundings generally.

Late in the afternoon of August 9 we were ready to receive our new shipmates, and they were conveyed across from the island in a big lighter, 20 at a time. Wisting and Lindstrom superintended the work of transport and maintained order capitally. They had succeeded in gaining the dogs' confidence, and at the same time their complete respect—just what was wanted, in fact.

At the Fram's gangway the dogs came in for an active and determined reception, and before they had recovered from their surprise and fright they were securely fastened on deck and given to understand with all politeness that the best thing they could do for the time being was to accept the situation with calmness. The whole proceeding went so rapidly that in the course of a couple of hours we had all the 97 dogs on board and had found room for them; but it must be added that the Fram's deck was utilized to the utmost.

We had thought we should be able to keep the bridge free, but this could not be done if we were to take them all with us. The last boatload, 14 in number, had to be accommodated there. All that was left was a little free space for the man at the wheel.

As for the officer of the watch, it looked as if he would be badly off for elbow room; there was reason to fear that he would be compelled to kill time by standing stock-still in one spot through the whole watch; but just then there was no time for small troubles of this sort. No sooner was the last dog on board than we set about putting all visitors ashore, and then the motor began working the windlass under the forecastle.

"The anchor's up!" Full speed ahead, and the voyage toward our goal, 16,000 miles away, was begun. Quietly and unobserved we went out of the fjord at dusk; a few of our friends accompanied us out.

After the pilot had left us outside Flekkero, it was not long before the darkness of the August evening hid the outlines of the country from our view; but Oxo and Ryvingen flashed their farewells to us all through the night.

Continued in next Sunday's American.

Captain Roald Amundsen Discoverer of the South Pole

Read His Own Story Each Week In the Sunday American

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