



Scots who made their mark on..... *The Known Extremes : 2 William Speirs Bruce*



William Speirs Bruce (1867—1921)

Like Sir James Clark Ross, nephew of Sir James Ross, earlier in the century William Bruce was a London-born Scots polar scientist, but whose achievements were not recognised in the same way as those of his famous predecessor.



Bruce led the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition (SNAE) in the opening years of the Twentieth Century to the South Orkney Islands (which lie just over 600 km N.E. of the tip of the Antarctic peninsula) and the Weddell Sea, shown at 11 o'clock in the diagram opposite. Bruce's team established the first permanent weather station south of the Antarctic Ocean.

Bruce's ship the *Scotia* carried a large scientific staff of naturalists, oceanographers and geologists, who investigated the Weddell Sea extensively, as shown in the detail of the 30p stamp from the 2002 B.A.T. set below



Bruce went on to found the Scottish Oceanographical Laboratory but further plans to walk across the land mass via the South Pole were abandoned through lack of money.

Bruce had gone to Edinburgh University to study medicine but in 1892 he gave it all up to join the Dundee Whaling Expedition as a science assistant on a journey to the Southern Ocean in an ultimately unsuccessfully attempt—Bruce who had not been afforded the promised scientific facilities called it "a miserable show" - to investigate the commercial possibilities of whaling for Right Whales in the Southern Ocean. When this was over he journeyed north to Franz Josef Land, shown arrowed right, to join the Jackson-Harmsworth Expedition, established on the ice for three years by then. Here, Bruce also met Fridtjof Nansen (Norway 1961) who had been sheltering on the island for a



year with a small party. Nansen was to provide Bruce with advice, inspiration and solace in future years. Although a bay in Franz Josef Land was named after him (Cape Bruce) by Frederick Jackson, Bruce was unwilling to share his scientific discoveries with anyone, a character trait that was to work to his disadvantage in future years.



He was a member of some expeditions to the Arctic mounted by the Prince Albert 1 of Monaco in his yacht *The Princess Alice* and promoting his love of oceanography made many valuable surveys of the seabed around Spitsbergen, the large Norwegian island territory in the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic Ocean. (Norway 1957, right)



With such experience under his belt, in 1899 Bruce applied to join Robert Scott's planned expedition to the South Pole, but delays and an unhelpful attitude from some officers of the Royal Geographical Society led him to plan his own expedition—the SNAE—and to enjoy a very cold relationship with the R.G.S. ever after.

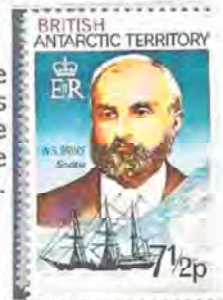


Left, the meteorological station set up by Bruce's party at Laurie Island in the South Orkneys in 1902 and a second stamp celebrating a century of such study

After the 1902-04 SNAE expedition, throughout the first two decades of the new century Bruce journeyed to the Arctic for scientific and commercial reasons on several occasions, but he made no further major expeditions after the first with the SNAE, a fact which is attributed to his lack of diplomatic skills which led to the making of a lot of enemies and to his strong Scottish nationalism.

However, it is only recently that the significance of the data Bruce's SNAE gathered in laying the foundations of modern climate change studies has been recognised.

B.A.T. 1973 showing Bruce and *Scotia*



Scots who made their mark on.....
The Known Extremes : 3 Sir James Clark Ross

Sir James Clark Ross (1800—1862)

In early Summer 1831 James Clark Ross became the first man to stand at the spot which his Vere Fox designed dip circle (compass) told him was the Earth's Magnetic North Pole and he would go on to become a famous Antarctic explorer. He was, it seems, born in London: although Alwyn James in *Other Men's Heroes* suggests it was possibly at the family home in Wigtownshire, Trew and Burns using the "Scots-born" criterion for inclusion do not list him in *Scots and Philately*.

Ross had reached this spot as a member of a four year expedition led by his uncle John Ross, on his second adventure to the Arctic circle, this time financed by Felix Booth, the famous London gin manufacturer after whom the surrounding territory was named Boothia and claimed for Britain. John Ross took his nephew James on to his first ship as a midshipman when he was aged 11 and kept a close eye on him for the next six years. Following the failure of John Ross's first Arctic expedition on which James served, Ross junior sailed on four expeditions led by his uncle's former First Mate William Parry, between 1819 and 1827.

James Ross then agreed to join his uncle's second to the Arctic setting out in 1829 on the side wheel steam ship *Victory* which became stuck in the ice in North West Canada for almost four years, but James Ross was now able to count on a nephew very experienced in that environment. And that was just as well as this expedition tested everyone on it to their extremes and, lasting for four years, was given up as lost : see separate article on *Sir John Ross*.

Once back in Britain and now promoted to Captain, James Ross was given the responsibility of making the first magnetic survey of the British Isles, an area of science that was to become his specialism and one that would lead him to the South Pole.

At Easter 1839, Ross was commissioned to lead two ships *H.M.S. Erebus* and *H.M.S. Terror*, the first of which, a fourteen

year old Hecla-class 370 ton bomb vessel, had been refitted as an exploration vessel. These type of ship already had extremely strong hulls to withstand the recoil of mortar bombs. Eighteen months later the two ships set out from Tasmania and in January 1841 their crews landed on Victoria Land to begin to survey that part of Antarctica. They discovered the Ross Ice Shelf but were able only to follow its perimeter before returning to Tasmania to reprovision. They returned the following year to survey the great ice barrier, reaching 78° South—a record which would stand for 58 years—and for a third time the following season, this time out of the Falkland Islands. Studies were made in magnetism, oceanography, botany and ornithology and the continent had been taken possession of in the name of Queen Victoria with many landmarks named after British historical figures.

(Ironically the two ships next explored the Arctic under the command of Sir John Franklin but became icebound and were abandoned with all crew lost. Now enabled, Sir James Ross set out to find traces of Franklin's expedition in 1848, his best friend Francis Crozier being a member of Franklin's team. And in 1850 his uncle Sir John Ross also tried to find traces of this expedition but both missions met no success).

Back in Britain Ross was greatly celebrated and settled down to family life and died at Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire in 1862. He had written about his Antarctic experiences in of *A Voyage of Discovery and Research to Southern and Antarctic Regions* and had been made F.R.S. as a result of his researches.

The exploration voyages conducted by James Ross's teams had provided spectacular leaps in data collection and appreciation of Antarctica, but Ross himself was disappointed to be unable to locate the southern magnetic pole, having located its northern partner so many years before. It would be 1909 before another Scot, Dr Alistair Forbes-Mackay would be part of an expedition that finally located that pole.



B.A.T 1973
Showing Ross & *Erebus*
G.B. 1972 F.S.A.T. 1976



B.A.T. 1991 showing *Erebus* and *Terror* and the research ship *James Clark Ross*

B.A.T. 1984 & 1993, showing Ross's ships and *Erebus* on Ross Dep 1967



F.S.A.T. 1980 showing *Terror* at Arched Rock, Kerguelen

F.S.A.T. 1984 showing *Erebus* in the Antarctic

