

The Race

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Roald Amundsen - aspiring doctor turned polar explorer,
Possessing much experience in pole and passage,
Wished to steer *Fram* through the ice drifts of the North Pole -
His knowledge of skis and survival was clearly above average.

Robert Falcon Scott, naval man, head of Discovery,
Fell out with Shackleton over Antarctic sectors and rights.
Attempting to seek glory for God, King and Country,
On the geographic South Pole, he set his sights.

In 1909, competing claims of victory were made
By Peary and Cook, a conquest of the Arctic.
For Amundsen - a change of plan, a shift in intent,
A telegram sent - '*Fram proceeding Antarctic*'.

With full scientific complement, Scott made base on Ross Island -
A site well suited for research and exploration.
Their route would traverse the Beardmore glacier,
Riddled with crevasses - a dangerous operation.

No such conflicting agendas for the Norwegian team -
Amundsen declared: '*Science would have to look after itself*'.
From Bay of Whales to Axel Heiburg Glacier,
The majority of distance was made across the Ross Ice Shelf.

Scott chose motor sleds, ponies, dogs and skis,
But none of his men were expert in their use.
Reluctant to learn, they resorted to manhauling -
A method slow and exhausting with a tendency to bruise.

Amundsen had experience with sled dogs in the Gjoa,
Supplemented by Inuit knowledge and champion skies.

He used the dogs to get onto the Polar Plateau,
Completing the first leg of his journey with ease.

Scott's team had not prepared for fuel and food;
The mistake resulted in scurvy and dehydration.
The Norwegians knew of fuel creep and soldered their cans,
Fresh meat and pemmican kept them from starvation.

Amundsen took clothing made entirely of furs;
They kept his men warm and prevented heat dissipation.
Scott's insufficient layers were of wool and cotton;
His sweat was liable to freeze due to poor ventilation.

The Norwegian team reached the pole first - 14 Dec 1911.
They left behind a tent, a flag, and a letter.
Amundsen had defeated the odds, reached ahead of Scott -
They arrived at the *Fram* 38 days later.

Scott left camp much later than Amundsen -
Ponies killed, supplies stored, provisions hauled on foot.
They reached the pole 5 weeks late - 17 Jan 1912.
Their debilitating expedition had borne no fruit.

Driven by deteriorating conditions, the men turned back,
Fighting malnutrition and unusually cold weather.
Edgar Evans was first, dying at the foot of a glacier;
The rest of them had reached the end of their tether.

Laurence Oates was next, with his frostbitten feet
'I am just going outside, and may be some time'
He walked into a blizzard, fierce with falling snow

Three men were left, nearing the end of the line.

Trapped in a tent with dwindling supplies,
Scott began to pen his final communication.
He, Bowers and Wilson died soon after,
11 miles from a depot that could've been their salvation.

Amundsen reached civilization in March of 1912.
He toured the world, repaying the debts he had incurred.
In England, his actions were deemed ungentlemanly;
He died unhappy about the criticisms he heard

Scott became a national hero, a martyr to the spirit of science;
Amundsen's success lay despondently in his shadow.
However, Scott's faults and failures were later reconsidered -
People began to realize the narrative should never be so narrow.

This race to the pole was the epitome of a golden age,
Despite the hardships faced and the soiling of reputation.
The victory and tragedy of these brave men
Live on in the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station.