

The 13th
**British
Silent Film
Festival**

The Race to the Pole: Britain and Norway

Friday 16 April, 4.15pm

A programme of short films documenting early Polar exploration

The extraordinary story of the race to the South Pole by Amundsen and Scott is put into context by polar film expert Jan-Anders Diesen from Norway with his colleague Neil Fulton. Most exciting is the footage Amundsen shot in the Antarctic – never seen here before and chosen for UNESCO's 'Memory of the World' collection of archive treasures. The programme concludes with a special preview of the BFI National Archive's forthcoming restoration of *The Great White Silence*, Herbert Ponting's record of Scott's final expedition to Antarctica introduced by Bryony Dixon.

Dash to the North Pole (1909)

This film footage of the Ziegler North Pole expedition was reissued in Britain by Charles Urban in 1909 when all things Polar were of almost obsessive interest to the British film going public. The American Robert Peary had reached the North Pole in April of 1909 but had no filmed evidence. Shackleton had reached the furthest point South that year and Captain Scott was raising funds for his expedition to the South Pole of 1910. This film shows the earlier American attempt on the North Pole filmed by expedition leader Anthony Fiala in 1903. It shows the expedition ship *S.S. America* in pack ice and attempting to land and shots of the expedition members with their dog sleds on the ice. Norwegian explorer Amundsen, hearing that the Americans had probably reached the North Pole, switched his destination and the race for the South Pole was on.

Amundsen Film (1911)

The film is unique, as it documents the important events of this first expedition to reach the South Pole. Though the material is incomplete, it is made up of original sequences, filmed between 1910 and 1912, consisting of negative film and first and second-generation print material. The cinema version was edited by the Norwegian film pioneer Hugo Hermansen from the footage filmed by Amundsen and Lieutenant Kristian Prestrud during the expedition. Amundsen did the filming until they reached Antarctica, and then Prestrud took over. Neither of them were trained cameramen but they knew the value of documenting the expedition. They thought less about telling the story of the expedition than documenting the landscape and the animal life. And it is important to remember that it was primarily views of this

previously unseen land and the wildlife that interested cinema exhibitors. Hermansen acquired the rights to show the film after Amundsen himself had used them during his lecture tour in Norway. The first screening of this cinema version was on the same day as Amundsen left Norway to start his world

lecture tour in Sweden on 29th September 1912.

Other polar films

The Antarctic Expedition of the Scotia (William S. Bruce 1902) 1 min

The Wellman Polar Expedition (Urban Trading Co 1906) 2 min

Antarctic Expedition of Shirase (Japanese Pathe 1912) 2min

Home of the Hurricane (Hurley 1913)
8 min

Canadian Arctic Expedition (Wilkins 1913-16)
3 min

South (Hurley
1919)

Southward on the Quest (Wilkins 1922) 1 min

The Great White Silence (1924) extract

A sneak preview of the BFI's forthcoming restoration. This the footage shot by Herbert Ponting of the during the first year of the Scott Expedition of 1910-13. His staggeringly beautiful still images of the trip are well known, as are Ponting's sound re edit *90 Degrees South* and the fictionalised account in Ealing's *Scott of the Antarctic*, but never before seen in it's original form, with tints and tones, is this silent feature released by Ponting in 1924.

South (1919) extract

Frank Hurley's spectacular film record of the *Endurance* voyage. Shackleton's expedition to cross the Antarctic was scotched when the

ship became trapped in the ice. The film of the end of the *Endurance* is one of the most moving and impressive sights ever filmed. The efforts of the expedition members to get home is the stuff of legend and the survival of the film nothing less than miraculous.