

The 13th
**British
Silent Film
Festival**

South: Sir Ernest
Shackleton's Glorious Epic of
the Antarctic
Friday 16th April, 9pm

Production Company: Imperial Trans-Antarctic Film
Syndicate

Photography: Frank Hurley

Expedition leader - Ernest Shackleton

Captain of 'Endurance' - F.A. Worsley

Captain of the 'Aurora' - J. Stenhouse

Meteorologist - L. Hussey

Scientific staff - Mr Wordie

Second in command
of the 'Endurance' - Frank Wild

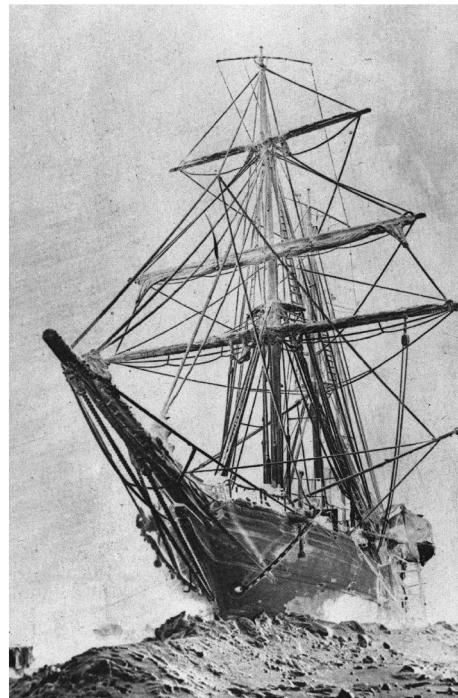
Synopsis

Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914-1916 Antarctic expedition to the South Pole. A few months into the journey the ship HMS Endurance becomes trapped in pack ice and is ultimately crushed. Shackleton and his crew, in three lifeboats, begin an 18-month, 1200 mile journey to safety across one of Earth's most inclement and unrelentingly beautiful continents.

Production and exhibition detail

South was first exhibited by Ernest Shackleton in 1919 to accompany his lectures, and it has some of the quality of a lecture. Excerpts of the journey are interspersed with scientific and biological

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observations and, towards the end, just when the dramatic tension reaches its height, there are almost 20 inexplicable minutes of nature footage, showing sea lions gambolling, penguins and other birds. Photographer *Frank Hurley* did not accompany *Shackleton* on the 800-mile rescue mission, so this material could not have been shot by him. All the same, it is a strange hiatus and obviously inserted as a crowd-pleaser.

Hurley was a genius of cinematography. As well as inventive camerawork, mixing close-ups, point-of-view shots and ingenious positioning of the camera, the film is shot through with colour, using the novel Paget colour process. In the Paget system, two glass plates were used, a colour screen on which was laid a matrix of red, green and blue filters, and a standard black and white negative plate. The result is highly effective. In a vast landscape of various shades of white, colour - purple sunsets, ethereal green seas, ink blue silhouettes - invests the film with drama, beauty and tension. By contrast, the black and white, untreated sequences, particularly the long shots of the crew in Antarctica, look flat and time-bound.

But the most famous shots are the stills *Hurley* took of the *Endurance*. In an age when night photography was rare, he surrounded the ship with magnesium flares and used a slow exposure to create the ghostly images of the *Endurance*

suspended in darkness. It is fair to say that the success of the film has more to do with the dramatic photography than the detail of what was filmed, although the sequence of the disintegration of the *Endurance* is incredible and, of course, the story itself could hardly be more spectacular.

There is little actual footage of *Shackleton* in the film; he is often a shadowy figure at a distance, separated from the men. This expedition was his second attempt at the South Pole. The first, in 1909 - for which he was knighted - came within 97 miles of the target. A third unsuccessful attempt followed in 1921. However, failure is relative, and his efforts undoubtedly spurred the success of *Roald Amundsen* and *Robert Scott* in 1911 and 1912. *Shackleton's* greatest achievement in 1916 was to return with all his men alive.

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<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/725774/>



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