

Paintings and photos of tragic Scott pole mission reunited

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Paintings and photographs capturing legendary British explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott's tragic race to the South Pole have been reunited for the first time in more than a century at a London gallery.

Photographer Herbert Ponting and watercolourist Edward Wilson dreamed of holding a joint exhibition to show their images of the beautiful but brutal Antarctic landscape, but Wilson's death on the ill-fated Terra Nova expedition made it impossible.

"Visions of the Great White South", which opened at London's Bonhams gallery this week, finally realises the pair's vision, and also showcases recently unearthed photographs taken by Scott himself.

Scott remains an iconic figure in Britain and his failed mission to be the first to reach the South Pole—resulting in the death of himself and four colleagues in 1912—holds a unique place in national folklore.

"He's one of those great British heroes," exhibition curator Charlotte Connelly told AFP on Wednesday.

"He was held up at the time as a hero for all the people going off to the First World War: he made the ultimate sacrifice for his nation.

"But also Antarctica is an amazing, remote place that very few people get to go to and I think that still holds sway."

Wilson captured the colours, otherworldly mirages and spirit-crushing scale of the ice sheet in a series of watercolours, whose impressionistic style reflected the climatic constraints.

With paint freezing in the sub-zero temperatures, the naturalist and artist sketched the scene and made a note of the colours, before filling in with watercolours at base camp.

Haunting images

Ponting's photographs open a window into the everyday grind of survival in freezing conditions, and recreate in great detail the constantly changing icy landscapes, sculpted by ferocious weather.

"Some of the images are really haunting," said Connelly.

"One of Scott's images is a bit overexposed and it looks like the men and their ponies are walking off into nothing, which I think is very touching."

One image shows footprints and sled trails disappearing into the horizon, another captures the men straining to pull their cargo through soft snow while the most spectacular illustrate the huge ice features, some perfectly geometric and others resembling frozen waves.

Captain Lawrence Oates, who Scott famously recorded in his diary as saying "I am just going outside and may be some time" before walking to his death, is also shown boiling dog food on a blubber stove.

Ponting's negatives have recently been blown up using cutting-edge technology to make them of exhibition quality, while Scott's negatives were only discovered in 2014.

The Terra Nova expedition—named after the boat which carried the men—was a scientific mission to Antarctica that took place between 1910 and 1913.

Scott also wanted to become the first to reach the South Pole, but on arriving on January 17, 1912, found out Norwegian Roald Amundsen had beaten him by 34 days.

Scott's entire party that reached the pole died of exhaustion and exposure on the return journey. Some of their bodies were found eight months later, along with journals and photographs.

The free exhibition will run until August 19.

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