

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Weddell seals

Date

1901-1904

Primary Maker

Charles Reginald Ford

Medium

Glass, ink on paper

Dimensions

Overall: 82 x 83 x 3 mm

Name

Lantern slide

History

This slide is part of a collection compiled by Charles Ford. Born in London in 1880, Ford joined the Royal Navy at the age of 15. He volunteered as ship's steward on the British National Antarctic Expedition, Commander Robert Falcon Scott's first expedition to the Antarctic on the DISCOVERY, joining from HMS VERNON. That expedition undertook the first extensive exploration on land in Antarctica with funding from the British government, The Royal Geographical Society and private donations. The expedition set up a base at McMurdo Sound from which sledging parties carried out reconnaissance and scientific programs. Scott made the first balloon ascent on the continent in 1902. A three-man sledge party of Scott, Shackleton and Wilson achieved a furthest south of 82.28 degrees on 23 December 1902. The expedition ship DISCOVERY, commissioned and built especially for the expedition, was beset at McMurdo Sound from 1902-04 (SPRI). Relief vessels the MORNING and TERRA NOVA assisted in freeing it. On his return to the UK, Ford acted as Scott's secretary and accountant and settled the expedition's affairs, including sale of the DISCOVERY. Ford accompanied Scott on lecture tours around the United Kingdom and also conducted his own lecture tours in Australia (c1910), New Zealand and also in Canada, entitled 'Through Antarctica, Reginald C Ford's Thrilling illustrated story of the voyage of the DISCOVERY', promoted by JC Williamson. Images from this collection of lantern slides were almost certainly used for those and subsequent lectures and in the published extracts from Ford's journal published in 1906 and 1908. His pictorial collection documents aspects of that first DISCOVERY voyage and its high-profile participants - Commander Robert Falcon Scott who was to perish on the TERRA NOVA expedition of 1910-13 after the race to the pole, Edward Wilson, ship's surgeon who later accompanied Scott on that ill-fated second voyage to die with him in his tent, and sub-lieutenant later Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton who while sent from the expedition due to

ill-health on the relief ship MORNING in 1903, visited Antarctica on the NIMROD in 1907-09 and led a well-publicised rescue expedition after his ship ENDURANCE was crushed by ice on his third expedition in 1914-16. The collection includes photographs by members of those two expeditions, photographers Herbert Ponting on the British Antarctic Expedition of 1910-13 and Frank Hurley on the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914-16 and was no doubt used for subsequent lecture tours. In 1906 Charles Reginald Ford immigrated to New Zealand where he became a successful architect. He published a short book on his experiences in 1908 from his journal entitled 'Antarctica leaves from a diary kept on board an exploring vessel' 1908, one of only three contemporary published accounts of the first Scott voyage. Charles Reginald Ford died in Auckland NZ 19 May 1972, the last survivor of the British National Antarctic expedition. Ford's collection of slides is a fresh perspective which allows us to explore this and the other early British expeditions from the point of view of the steward in control of stores, victualling, health, medical supplies and, after the cook left on the relief ship MORNING, the daily diet. Photographs and the edited extracts and images published in Ford's journal show his interest in this environment, and its wildlife - penguins, seals and birds. Ford was especially interested in their behaviour but also had more immediate needs. He commented 'We owe a good deal to our friend the Weddell [seal] - we have lived on him for months with occasional changes to Skua Gulls...' (CR Ford 'Antarctica leaves from a diary kept on board an exploring vessel' New Zealand Booklet Series no.7 1908). As Scott wrote in his account of the voyage 'A ship's steward is an especially important individual in an exploring vessel; he has to keep the most exact account of the stores to be expended, and of those that remain... I decided to give it to CR Ford, who, although a very young man without experience, showed himself to be well fitted for it in other respects. He soon mastered every detail of our stores, and kept his books with such accuracy that I could rely implicitly on his statements...' (The voyage of the Discovery London 1905). Ford broke his leg in February 1902 when, with laboratory assistant Horace C Buckridge and seaman John D Walker he 'had been running the slope on ski in bad light, and that Ford, whose sight is not so good, had failed to see a steep drop from the ice-foot and had fallen over it, with the result that his leg had caught in the tide crack and was injured.' He was the first to occupy the small sick bay. The fracture healed quickly and in less than six weeks he was allowed to resume his duties. (Scott, The Voyage of the Discovery, London 1905). In 1903 Ford participated in a sledging trip to lay a depot for the Southern party at Minna Bluff. Scott, upon returning from another sledging party later that year (Dec 1903) recorded 'I found that Ford had become cook for the few who remained on board, and that, as a result of studying Mrs Beeton's cookery book, he was achieving dishes of a more savoury nature than we had thought possible with the resources at our command.'