

## ANTARCTIC IMPRESSIONS\*

*Mrs. Finn Ronne*

I AM not a photogrammetrist and I certainly should not be on this program. Perhaps I am just to be Exhibit A.

The last two years have been very busy ones, first in doing everything possible to make the expedition a reality, and then in helping with the final arrangements for the expedition. This involved numerous details and checks and counter-checks, and as this was our expedition, we felt particularly responsible.

The detail work was considerable and as the time was getting late—it was necessary that we reach the Antarctic before the winter ice formed in order that our ship could get as close to our base as possible—we decided to sail and complete our letters, records, check-off lists, et cetera, on the way. I therefore made an unscheduled departure with the group from Texas in order to help with this work.

At first, I expected to go only to Panama. The group was a small one for our ambitious program, and in Panama there were still numerous tasks demanding attention, so I continued to Valparaiso. At Valparaiso, it was decided definitely that I would go all the way in order to take over some of my husband's lesser responsibilities, and so release him for the more arduous ones. My sole interest was in the success of that expedition on which both of us had spent so very much time and energy.

Ever since returning home, our time has been so crowded that I have not had very much opportunity to think about being one of the few who have been privileged to winter in the Antarctic. All of our thinking has been in terms of reports and the results.

My experiences, needless to say, were most interesting and not too difficult, as my jobs were mostly indoors. Apart from my duties as assistant coordinator of the scientific work, I prepared the newspaper releases (we had a contract with the North American Newspaper Alliance), I kept the daily records of all the work done, and I made the daily routine tidal and seismographic observations when our geophysicist, Mr. Thompson, was out at the advance base during the summer trail program.

The tidal observations were very simple, but the seismographic work was more complicated and had to be accomplished in the dark. The seismograph was installed on solid rock and in a separate shack. Every twelve hours I went to the seismographic shack, pulled up the trapdoor, and changed the recording paper; then the apparatus was checked for correct operation and the necessary adjustments made. Andy's battery system to insure continuous 24-hour operation was a Ginsberg contraption, but it worked most satisfactorily.

The photographic recording sheets then had to be developed. After competing for a few days with Bill Latady for sufficient water to wash each print six times, I realized what kept Andy so well occupied day after day when he was in camp. We naturally had plenty of ice, but melting it for large quantities of water was not so simple.

We received an excellent record of the earthquakes from all over the world, on this first continuous station to be maintained in the Antarctic.

The trail work and the flying were the hazardous jobs. The flying, of course, was essential, but the most dependable means of transportation in this territory is still the dog team. We could not have gotten along without our surface parties.

Our camp was located in latitude 68° 12' South. Actually, we were about as

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far south as Narvik, Norway, is north; many people live that far north. However we were more isolated than Narvik because Antarctica is still in the glacier period and is ice-locked and barren. There are not the resources in the Antarctic for people to live on as in the Arctic.

The Ronne living quarters at the expedition headquarters on Stonington Island was a 12-foot square shack attached to the main bunkhouse by a tunnel. My husband made two small double-pane windows in this shack in order to enlarge our vision. I made curtains for the windows. At the foot of the large built in-bunk, my husband built shelves for storing our clothing. I covered the shelves with canvas and bordered them with orange-colored airplane tape. We had a homemade table covered with billiard cloth; a smaller table with a typewriter was in one corner of the room. A short-wave radio, a small washstand, some chairs and a small coal stove completed our furnishings. Of course, a large map of the continent hung on one of the walls and a barometer close by.

My books, mostly about the Antarctic, were on the tables and shelves. Our quarters were really not bad.

The scenery on our island was superb. Our base was completely surrounded by rocky, snow-covered mountains, and the view from our windows was magnificent. It was worth the almost daily snow-shoveling necessary to keep the windows free.

From these windows, we saw Neny Mountain, 2,160 feet high, Figure Four Mountain, 3,100 feet high, Red Oak Ridge, 2,000 feet high, all rising at an angle of  $45^\circ$  directly from sea level. There were visible also other odd-shaped mountains, as well as the 120-ft, ice wall of the glacier descending to our island and attaching it to the mainland.

By climbing on skis up the glacier, we could enjoy the spectacular views of the most distant mountains, some in excess of 8,500 feet in height, and of the gaping, crevassed glaciers. When the sun shone on the snow-covered mountains, it produced the colors of a brilliant opal. Here and there on the bare rocky outcrops, the sun revealed less subtle colors—vivid pinks, reds, violets, greens. The huge bergs frozen into the near-by bay shone like diamonds.

Thus, there were compensations for the cold and uncomfortably high winds. I was comfortable with my work in our shack, but always struggling with the temperamental coal stove upon which I was dependent, not only for heat but also occasionally for melting ice for doing bathing and washing.

While I was comfortable in the shack, the men in the field were often confined to their tents by the high winds and overcast. At one time, eight of the men were confined to two tents for five days by an 87 mph wind. The tents became covered with snow and the men established communication with each other by tunneling through the snow.

I can truthfully say that I was not bothered much by the cold in the Antarctic. The winds were very bad, but when they were too uncomfortable, I just stayed indoors.

For my part, I think the most difficult part of the experience was not the endurance of the cold and winds and the inconvenience of a camp, but the worry resulting from many of the members of the expedition not always obeying the rules and observing every safety precaution. Expedition members new to the Antarctic, sometimes were too willing to take chances, not understanding that patience and continual practice of every safety observance were absolutely essential at all times. One cannot treat the Antarctic Continent lightly.