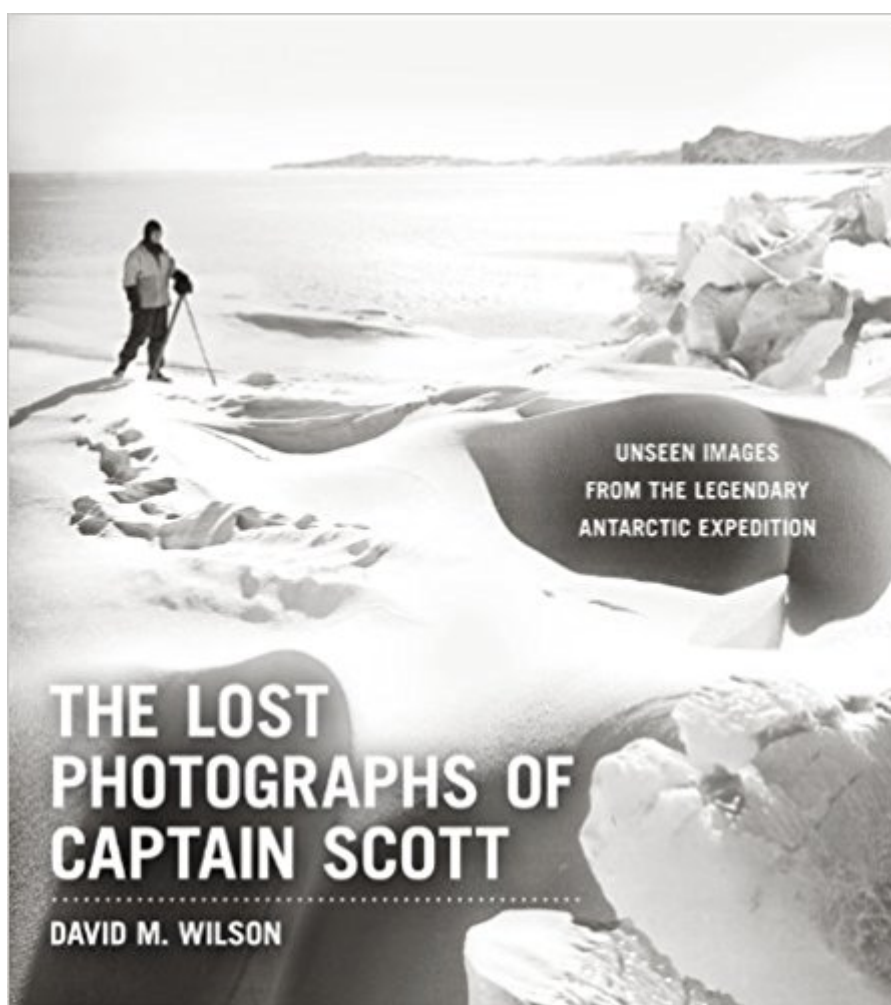


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The Lost Photographs Of Captain Scott: Unseen Images From The Legendary Antarctic Expedition



Synopsis

The myth of Scott of the Antarctic, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, icon of fortitude and courage who perished with his fellow explorers on their return from the South Pole on March 29th, 1912, is an enduring one, elevated, dismantled and restored during the turbulence of the succeeding century. Until now, the legend of the doomed Terra Nova expedition has been constructed out of Scott's own diaries and those of his companions, the sketches of 'Uncle Bill' Wilson and the celebrated photographs of Herbert Ponting. Yet for the final, fateful months of their journey, the systematic imaging of this extraordinary scientific endeavor was left to Scott himself, trained by Ponting. In the face of extreme climactic conditions and technical challenges at the dawn of photography, Scott achieved an iconic series of images; breathtaking polar panoramas, geographical and geological formations, and action photographs of the explorers and their animals, remarkable for their technical mastery as well as for their poignancy. Lost, fought over, neglected and finally resurrected, Scott's final photographs are here collected, accurately attributed and catalogued for the first time: a new dimension to the last great expedition of the Heroic Age and a humbling testament to the men whose graves still lie unmarked in the vastness of the Great Alone.

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Customer Reviews

David M. Wilson, a highly respected polar historian who regularly lectures on exploration history, is a great nephew of Dr. Edward Wilson, who died with Captain Scott and his party. He is currently Chairman of the Scott Centenary Committee at the Scott Polar Research Institute, where he is co-ordinating many of the major centenary events.

If you are someone interested, as I am, in the heroic age of Polar exploration, this book is for you. The photos are huge and beautifully reproduced. If you have read Scott's journal or Huntford's book or Crane's or Cherry-Garrard's, you have formed an image in your mind of what it must have looked like to be at Hut Point or starting the trek up the Beardmore Glacier or pulling a heavily-laden sledge. This wonderful book gives you exactly what it looked like: the pony camp, the tents, the sledges, the mountain ranges, One Ton Depot--yes, there are three or four photos that Scott took of One Ton Depot, which he later died only a few miles away from. You need not delve into the controversy concerning Scott's leadership; just immerse yourself in the immense whiteness that those intrepid men entered into of their own free will, and be amazed that ANY of them lived through it. Short of going there yourself, there is nothing like this book. The photos are supplemented by numerous excellent, detailed maps, better than I have seen in any other book, that give the reader a very good idea of where the photos were taken. The accompanying text is generally helpful, though it begins and ends with a strange attempt to impose a supernatural "camera as Jonah" silliness on the photos that I found very distracting. Other than the words of the explorers themselves, this is the most valuable book I have seen about Scott's last expedition. Wow.

This provides a very interesting additional perspective on Scott's Terra Nova Expedition. Although it is quite a large format, the publishers have seen fit to print some pictures so large that they require two pages. Whilst I understand the desire to provide greater magnification, I wish that they'd left these images whole and uninterrupted on a single page. Still, worth owning.

The book content itself is wonderful, but I had a difficult time obtaining an undamaged copy. The first 2 copies were ripped or marked in some way. The book was intended as a gift, and the final 3rd copy was also slightly damaged, but since it seemed like the whole shipment must have been defective, I kept it.

At first glance, the book appears as a catalog of Captain Scott's long lost photographs detailing his scientific mission in Antarctica, and the arduous trek to the south pole from which he and his small band of men never returned. But the book is much more than that. It is written by David Wilson, the great nephew of of Edward Wilson, who was Scott's close friend, and who perished with him on the return trip from the pole. David's great uncle Edward was, first and foremost, a scientist and a gifted artist whose sketches of the Antarctic terrain were, in the early 20th century, the principle means by

which explorers and scientists visually recorded for others what they themselves had seen. But a new technological age was dawning, and photography was one of the advances that was being slowly adopted by hobbyists, first, then by scientists who used cameras in their field work. David Wilson therefore has a very special point of view which enables him not merely to produce a book of pictures and captions, but also to tell us a story, and give us a faithful record, of the polar mission. Scott, Wilson and Evans are three of the most well remembered explorers who sought to learn about Antarctica and to plant the British flag at the pole. But David Wilson's narrative introduces us to Herbert Ponting, without whom there would scarcely be any photographic evidence of the expedition whatsoever. Ponting was among the eminent photographers of his day. And Scott, as an innovator, quickly understood how he might contribute to the scientific undertaking of the expedition. Herbert Ponting was persuaded by Scott -without too much effort- to join the party. This gives us a glimpse of Scott's character and nature. He understood the scientific purpose of his trip, and he appreciated the technical assets and technical talent which would advance and support their mission. If Ponting was eager to become part of the quest, then Scott was just as enthusiastic about learning how to take photographs. In that day, it was not mere "point and shoot." Equipment was awkward, large, and heavy; hardly suited to a trek where the weight of equipment and goods must be carefully calculated to be borne over a barren terrain which only sapped the strength of man and beast. Likewise, technique was essential; the equipment was no more forgiving of error than was the environment in which it was deployed. David Wilson tells us that composition was important to making a good photographic record; objects in the foreground must serve to mirror the subject matter in the distance, and guide the viewer's eye into the over-all scene, as if you were there. And so it is with Wilson's story. The photographs and narrative are a kind of metaphor for the larger purposes at hand; the scientific investigations, the trip to the pole. And all of this falls within the context of human endeavor, struggle and heroism; the character of people, personalities; the almost unbelievable challenges of a climate which is alternately sub-zero, then unexpectedly balmy, and deadly in either case. The story, and the way the story is written, is compelling and it is balanced. You come away knowing what happened and how it happened and why it happened. And, yes, you see, literally see, the evidence. And let this work put an end to the arguments about whether Scott was primarily interested in a "race" to the pole for the honor of his country, or was most dedicated to a mission of discovery and scientific inquiry. The sheer bulk of equipment and talents of the people argue strongly that a spirit of inquiry and a drive to broaden knowledge was the essential purpose. But perhaps more convincing are the many diary entries and personal notes which more clearly than anything else reveal motive and inspiration. You may place this book on your coffee-table, but

don't start to read it until you are prepared to settle in for hours at a time. I suggest you keep a sweater nearby, because, no matter what the temperature, you'll feel the cold. In the end, the book is a brilliant exposition which reveals the historical context of the undertaking, the broad strokes of the quest, and the details of the efforts to record the endeavor. Wilson's work is a welcome addition on the shelves of historians, scientists, serious photographers, and those who simply want to know, "what happened?" Highly recommended.

This beautifully complements Scott's diaries ("The Last Expedition") not only through the photographs themselves, but by the details and maps in Wilson's narrative. Scott has been cruelly used and maligned—first by the establishment who used his death to inspire similar acts of sacrifice for the country in the first world war, and then maliciously slandered by Roland Hartford who attempted to portray Scott as an ignorant buffoon whose ineptitude led to his own and his companions' deaths. Both are wrong and have served only to airbrush from history how important a scientific exploration Scott's was, and how first rate he was as an explorer. Wilson puts both of these abuses of Scott's legacy in the graves they deserve and reveals Scott the man and naturalist explorer. That Scott endured freak weather conditions (known now to occur very rarely; Hartford and co all ignore this and the fact that in 1910-12, very little was known at all about Antarctica; Scott studied and used all the known data from Cook to Ross to Shackleton's early south pole expedition; none foresaw temperatures of -40°F for over a month plus associated blizzards. It was known as a safe period, with temperatures of -4°F to -20°F. That Amundsen had all the luck Scott didn't is hardly a reason to damn him, and by common consent, Amundsen's expedition was worthless; no scientific data was collated—even his route wasn't mapped!). As Scott said, it was simply bad luck and down to providence) and was used by people for their own ends (war propaganda or—in Hartford's case, easy money by slandering the dead) really shouldn't rubbish Scott as a great man. The poignancy of these photographs that are of a doomed set of people easily equals the poignancy of Scott's diaries.

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