HISTORIC SITES IN ANTARCTICA

HUT POINT

On June 10, 1900, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, R.N., was appointed leader of the British "National Antarctic Expedition, 1901-1904". This was a major expedition, sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Society, and the personnel included five able scientists. A 700-ton vessel, the "Discovery" was specially built, and largely manned by Navy personnel. Leaving Lyttelton, New Zealand, on December 21, 1901, "Discovery" reached "McMurdo Bay" a month later. Scott realized that the "Bay" was really a strait, and after a cruise along the edge of the "barrier" and the discovery of King Edward VII Land, he returned to what is now called "McMurdo Sound" and on February 8, 1902, selected as his base site the southern side of a small point just north of Cape Armitage. Here a hut was built and the name "Hut Point" was born. "Discovery" was frozen in about 200 yards from the hut and the whole company of over 40 men lived on the ship, using the hut for storage and other purposes.

A pioneer sledging party got into trouble during a blizzard. A sailor, George Vince, lost his footing and plunged to his death over the cliffs named Danger Slopes. You will see the cross erected by his shipmates on Hut Point, close to the Hut itself.

After the winter, Scott, Dr. Wilson and Lieutenant Shackleton made the first attempt to penetrate into the heart of the Antarctic. Leaving the ship on November 2, 1902, they dog-sledged across the ice-shelf for 59 days and covered 380 miles to the South. But by this time unsatisfactory food had rendered the dogs useless and the men themselves were smitten with scurvy. On December 30 the three sick, hungry men turned back, and after a nightmare journey, during part of which Shackleton had to be drawn on a sledge by his companions, reached the ship on February 3, 1903.

The relief ship "Morning" found "Discovery" still solidly frozen in, and Scott with most of his men remained for a second winter. In the Spring, with P.O. Evans and Lashley, he made a great sledge journey up the Ferrar Glacier, a route that had been pioneered by Lieutenant Armitage the previous year, and for nearly 300 miles west across the plateau.

Two relief ships arrived on January 5, 1904. At the last minute, "Discovery" broke free and the expedition reached Lyttleton on April 1, 1904, en route for home.

The old hut at Hut Point was destined to be used by later parties far more than it was used by its builders.

~~A third~~ The hut, ~~that~~ built at "Hut Point" near the modern American McMurdo Station, was excavated by four members of the New Zealand Antarctic Society in the summer of 1963-64. It has been restored to the state it was in when occupied by Mackintosh and his four surviving companions in 1916.