Sørpolen 1911-2011 – in Roald Amundsen’s
Tracks to the South Pole. Report flag # 52

The Centenary Expedition to the South Pole has retraced Amundsen’s route, and reached the southernmost point on Earth on 14 December 2011, arriving 100 years to the day after Amundsen.

The expedition

From the starting point in Hvalbukta (the Bay of Whales), where Amundsen’s base camp Framheim was situated in 1911, the route traverses more than 700 km inland over Rossisen (the Ross Ice Shelf), up Axel Heibergbreen (the Axel Heiberg Glacier) and onward to the Pole.

No one has taken this route since 1911. Amundsen set out with 52 dogs and returned with 11. We were not using dogs to pull our gear. Dogs are now banned from Antarctica for fear they might introduce species that would perturb the ecosystem.

We did not intend to replicate what Amundsen and his men accomplished 100 years ago. But even if the terrain we crossed is known, and our equipment was state-of-the-art, it is still a long, cold, windy journey – and the South Pole Plateau is still at 3000 m elevation.

Due to complicated weather conditions at Union Glacier in Antarctica our departure from Punta Arenas in Chile was severely delayed. It turned out that we started 13 days after Amundsen from the Bay of Whales, i.e. while he started October 19th in 1911 we set out on November 1st 2011.

The Prime Minister of Norway took part in the celebration at the South Pole on December 14th. Since our expedition was part of the Norwegian official delegation at the South Pole at the centenary, we tried very hard to arrive on time for the centenary. After six weeks we managed to reach the Pole, just in time.
Figure 1: Amundsen’s (from Framheim) and Scott’s (from Kapp Evans) original routes.
Expedition team members and outreach

We wanted to transform this journey into something more than just a skiing outing to the South Pole. We represent a rare combination of theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience of expeditions – and we wanted to use this ski trip through parts of the world’s least studied continent as a showcase to share what we know about research, skiing, adventuring, and polar history. To reach this goal, we have communicated with school children and mass media throughout the expedition. A television documentary will be produced (by March 2012) on Norwegian TV2 and a book will be published in the autumn of 2012 by Stein P. Aasheim. We blogged every day during the expedition (http://sorpolen2011.npolar.no/en/).

The following persons were part of the expedition:

*The skier*

Vegard Ulvang (born 1963). One of Norway’s all-time greatest skiers. Vegard has 14 World Championship and Olympic medals and has won many competitions in the World Cup. He has also undertaken a series of expeditions in various parts of the world. More recently, he has made a mark as a dedicated proponent of environmental protection.

*The scientist*

Jan-Gunnar Winther (born 1962). Director of the Norwegian Polar Institute. Jan-Gunnar has a PhD in polar hydrology from the Norwegian Institute of Technology and has been involved in polar research for 20 years. His specialty is climate studies of glaciers and sea ice. In 2007-2008 he led the Norwegian-American research traverse to the South Pole, a project under the International Polar Year.

*The adventurer*
Stein P. Aasheim (born 1951). The nestor of Norwegian adventurers after having scaled peaks (including the first Norwegian climb up Mt. Everest), paddled rivers, traversed through deserts and jungles and sailed the seven seas. Stein has published a dozen books and created many television programmes.

The historian

Harald Dag Jølle (born 1971). Polar historian at the Norwegian Polar Institute. Harald Dag was co-editor of a three-part reference work on Norwegian polar history (Norsk polarhistorie) and recently published a biography of Fridtjof Nansen for the publishing house Gyldendal Norsk Forlag. Like the others, he is no novice to long ski trips and steep mountains.
At the South Pole

Figure 2: Polar explorer Børge Ousland (left) and flag holder Dr. Jan-Gunnar Winther at South Pole on December 14, 2011.
Figure 3: The expedition team together with the Prime Minister of Norway, Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, at the geographical south pole (from left to right: Winther, Aasheim, Stoltenberg, Ulvang and Jølle)
Figure 4: Simon Stephenson from National Science Foundation (USA) gives a speech at the official centennial ceremony. A bust of Roald Amundsen made out of ice had been prepared for the occasion.