MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

1Roald Amundsen's South Pole Expedition (1910-1912)

REF N° 2004-14

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

Roald Amundsen and his 4-man team reached the South Pole, with the help of polar dogs, on 14 December 1911. The expedition, and particularly the dog-sled journey to the Pole, is described as daring and with an exceptionally good logistic planning and execution.

The Antarctic and the Arctic Polar Regions, for several centuries, were regarded as the final frontiers for mankind to conquer, and the North and South Poles were for a long period of time the great goals to attain within geographic discovery.

The discoveries in the polar areas contributed, not least in Norway but also internationally, to greater consciousness of, and political interest in, questions concerning sovereignty and rights in these sea and land areas.

The original film material of Roald Amundsen's South Pole Expedition documents a great historic achievement, outside the borders of the civilized world and in an extreme climatic environment.

In his time, Roald Amundsen (1872 – 1928) contributed, through several expeditions and together with his teams, to new knowledge within several aspects of polar research. First and foremost, however, he is remembered as a master of the classic polar expedition's planning and execution.

The film collection is unique, as it documents the important events of this first expedition to reach the South Pole. Though the material is incomplete, it is made up of original sequences, filmed between 1910 and 1912, consisting of negative film and first and second-generation print material.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

Vigdis Lian, Managing Director, Norwegian Film Institute
Jonny Edvardsen, Director of Department, National Library of Norway

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

Norwegian Film Institute, National Film Archive
National Library of Norway, National Audiovisual Archive

2.3 Contact person (s)

Lise Gustavson, Department Manager at the Film Archive, Norwegian Film Institute
Asbjørn Straumfors, Department Manager at the Sound and Image Archive,
National Library of Norway

2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

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3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

[ROALD AMUNDSEN: THE SOUTH POLE]
Title no.: 19517. Compilation with alternative titles:
"Fram" in the ice.
R.A. South Pole.
Roald Amundsen South Pole 1912.
Roald Amundsen's South Pole films.
The South Pole: Roald Amundsen.

The Third "Fram" Expedition to the South Pole
NK-00372

"Fram" on its way to the South Pole
NK-02101

Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition 1911
NK-03875

Amundsen at the South Pole 1911
NK-06713

3.2 Description

The collection consists of 7 sections of nitrate film. The material is incomplete, and somewhat fragmented. It is made up of original sequences, filmed between 1910 and 1912, consisting of negative film and first and second-generation print material. Some reels have several titles. The collection is registered in the MAVIS database and SIFT.

4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Authenticity

The film medium is nitrate celluloid. It is a well-known feature of this material's organic chemical component that it degrades over time, no matter what conservation measures are carried out, or how optimal the climatic conditions are for storage.

It has been estimated that as much as 80% of all global film production recorded on nitrate film base, has now been lost. Seen in such a light, and in a future perspective, we must regard it as a rarity that we today possess original film material from Roald Amundsen's South Pole expedition 1910-1912. In that period, film as a medium was still young and immature, especially in the fields of documentation/documentary filming, expressions that still lay in the future, but that in terms of content found a use as short spots in the form of "news" in contemporary newsreels, or as travelogues.

The material has a documentary character, as we know the genre today, and it appears now as it would have done then, as a realistic witness of the actual events.

4.2 World significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability

The original film material must be regarded as unique, as it documents in moving pictures the important events concerning this first expedition to reach the South Pole. From what we know today, this material is the only moving picture documentation of the expedition, and amongst the first film to have been made in this part of the Antarctic.

In a dramatic race against time and the weather, and not least with his British competitor Robert F. Scott, Amundsen risked all to attain his goal to be the first to reach the South Pole. To recreate such a first-time event afterwards is impossible.

After careful evaluation of the experiences and descriptions of others such as Carsten Brochgrevink, Ernest Shackleton and Scott, of this part of Antarctica, Amundsen chose a route which had not been used before. The Antarctic represented an enormous logistic challenge, with unknown areas, hidden crevasses, extreme climate conditions, difficult navigation, problems with food supplies and communication, and, not least, the techniques of successful travel.

Explorers and scientists are important parts of any country's construction of its own national image, but also in the international community there has always been great interest in the results and achievements of polar explorers. In Norway, Amundsen's expeditions – particularly to the South Pole – led to a strengthening of the national identity and a belief in the future for the newly independent nation. Norway has continued to contribute to the geographical and scientific exploration of the polar areas as part of a large international commitment. The common international polar commitment has led to the fact that we today have one of the oldest, treaty-governed and comprehensive international scientific partnerships of modern times: the Antarctic Treaty of 1959.

The inheritance from the earlier polar history must be seen as an important part of the common history of man, concerning as it does the conquering of the globe and the furthestmost points of the earth, the individual's fight to attain his goals, and the cooperation and fellowship across national boundaries and nationalities. Over time, the polar areas have been the theme and goal for innumerable theses, books, films and new expeditions. These build on the first explorers' own accounts of the nature, challenges, dangers and triumphs, described through the written word, photographs and moving pictures, which today present an inexhaustible source of fascinating impressions.

4.3 Criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style

Throughout history, inaccessible and little known territories have often been described in epic and dramatic terms. The polar regions, the Antarctic and Arctic, were regarded for centuries as the last frontier to conquer, inaccessible and suffering from climatic conditions that were beyond the bounds of human belief – until they were conquered. The conquest of Antarctica heralded a virtually entire and complete mapping of the earth’s land and sea areas.

Amundsen's expedition proved that it was possible for man to reach right to the heart of the Antarctic continent and back again with relative "easiness", as long as one was prepared to the smallest detail. Many have later followed in his expedition's sledge tracks, and with considerable results. Continual and extensive research is now carried out in the polar areas, where many of the programmes are particularly important for an understanding of the global environment and future climate changes.

Roald Amundsen’s active period as discoverer and polar scientist was at a time when industrial and technological development had accelerated in many different fields, and a string of new inventions followed. It is, therefore, paradoxical in this context that the South Pole expedition used the oldest, in many ways most primitive, methods: sail/steamship, skis and dog sleds. This was because Amundsen knew that the contemporary technology was not well enough tested for the climatic conditions in the Antarctic.

4.4 Issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management

The conquest of the Antarctic, manifested by mankind’s presence at the Pole, virtually completed the world vision of mankind ruling the Earth. The fact that Norwegians were at the forefront of this conquest was especially significant for the Norwegian people’s national identity and their national character.

This documentary material is extremely rare and exhibits integrity both in content and form in the way it authentically portrays the actual events. We follow a crew and an expedition on their way to what was then regarded as the unknown, well aware that there was an equal chance of catastrophe as of success.

Roald Amundsen (1872 – 1928) devoted most of his life and work to various expeditions in the polar areas. He was controversial, loved and hated. His role was primarily that of a seafarer, discoverer and adventurer, rather than of a research scientist. Even so, he and his teams contributed through several expeditions to comprehensive and often new knowledge, particularly within ethnography, earth magnetism and oceanography.

The list of his expeditions bears testament to impressive courage, daring and knowledge in a field where the result could be dependent on each person's ability and will to survive Nature’s merciless forces.

Roald Amundsen’s expeditions:
1897–1899: Belgian expedition led by Adrien de Gerlache de Gomery. Amundsen joined as first mate on the ship "Belgica", which involuntarily became the first ship to winter in the Antarctic. Amundsen contributed, together with the American Dr. Frederick Cook, to the survival of the expedition by supplying the members with seal and penguin meat to counter scurvy.

1903–1906: Amundsen and the Norwegian/Danish crew of ”Gjøa” found the seaway through the North West Passage. Seafarers for 300 to 400 years (!) had tried to navigate the difficult sea area, but this had not yet been done with complete success. After thorough studies of all known descriptions of the area, especially from British expeditions, Amundsen was able to organize his expedition and choose a ship specifically suited to the conditions. The expedition yielded significant research results and new knowledge within ethnography and earth magnetism, as well as some mapping of new areas.

1910–1912: Amundsen and a four-man team reached the South Pole first on 14 December 1911, after what is often described as a race between Amundsen and Briton Robert Falcon Scott. Amundsen had planned and organised his expedition to go to the North Pole, using Fridtjof Nansen’s ship “Fram”. Once at sea, Amundsen admits to the world, and his crew, that his goal is the South Pole, despite the fact that Scott was in the process of carrying out his second try at the Pole. Amundsen received great praise and fame, and a lot of criticism. The expedition returned with few research results, but is still regarded as perhaps the most daring and well-executed sled trip of all times.

1918–1921: Amundsen and a Norwegian crew tried to reach far north in the ice on ”Maud”, testing Fridtjof Nansen’s theory of drifting with the ice across the North Pole. The expedition did not succeed and managed little more than to navigate the North-East Passage. It was therefore regarded as a failure. When "Maud" broke free from the ice she set course for Seattle for repairs and bunkering before a new attempt.

1922–1923: Amundsen tried again to reach the North Pole, this time by airplane from Alaska's north coast. The attempts, which were described as experiments, ended with dramatic crashes, literally and financially. Without Amundsen the "Maud" and her crew were again sent north to drift over the Arctic Basin 1922-25, but they never reached the east-west current. Despite this, extensive and important geophysical research results were obtained under the leadership of H.U. Sverdrup.

1925: Amundsen and American Lincoln Ellsworth attempted to reach the North Pole with 2 Dornier-Wal flying boats with Norwegian/German crew. They started from Ny-Ålesund in Svalbard, but did not reach all the way to the Pole before they landed with technical problems. The expedition aroused great media interest internationally, especially once it had lost contact with the outside world. On their return the members were received as heroes.

1926: The Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile Transpolar Flight expedition. The italian-built airship "Norge", with a Norwegian/Italian/Swedish crew, was followed by eyes of the world on its flight from Rome–Oslo–Leningrad–Vadsø, and thereafter to Ny-Ålesund, after a dramatic flight over the Barents Sea. The expedition, which was organized and supported by Norsk Luftseiladsforening, reached the North Pole after a 16-hour flight from Svalbard, and landed at Teller, Alaska, after a total 72-hour flight. The expedition was regarded as successful, although this was overshadowed in the eyes of the world media by the disagreement between Amundsen and the Italian engineer, Umberto Nobile concerning which of them had the most honour for the success.

In 1928, Amundsen led one of several search parties for Nobile’s Italian airship expedition to the North Pole, which had crashed on the ice north-east of Svalbard. Amundsen left Tromsø in the French aircraft “Latham”, together with a five-man crew. After a few hours in the air, the aircraft crashed in the sea, probably close to Bjørnøya (Bear Island). All on board were lost.

5 LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

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5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

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5.3Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership

Institutional ownership.

(b) Accessibility

Available / Partially available. (Describes the current situation)

(c) Copyright status

Public domain.

(d) Responsible administration

Norwegian Film Institute
National Library of Norway

6 MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1 The Norwegian Film Institute is a state-owned institution that is responsible for a number of functions in the Norwegian film industry and the audio-visual community. Since its foundation in 1956, NFI has been a Norwegian national film archive, mainly concerned with collecting, preserving and providing public access to the national film heritage, and since 1990 it has been the administrator for legal deposit of film in Norway.

In 1989 the National Library of Norway's Division in Mo i Rana was established with particular responsibility for legal deposit in Norway, and in 1992 the Sound and Image Archive was established with particular responsibility for keeping audio-visual material. At the same time, a in-house laboratory/medialaboratory was established to conduct technical restoration.

Norway's national collections of nitrate film were then localized to the National Library of Norway, Mo i Rana, in a specially-built storage for such film. The Norwegian Film Institute and the National Library of Norway have a collaborative responsibility for preserving and provide access to the national nitrate film heritage.

The documentary material is organized in a programme for preservation and transfer to polyester film base and with the intention to provide new access to the material.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 As the responsible custodian of the material, the Norwegian Film Institute, represented by Vigdis Lian, launched the proposal for nomination to the Norwegian UNESCO Commission for the first time in 2000.

At its meeting in November 2002, the Norwegian UNESCO Commission proposed nominating the collection Roald Amundsen’s South Pole Expedition 1910-1912, for UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register.

Dr. Susan Barr has been a consultant for the historical questions concerning Roald Amundsen's expeditions and polar history in general. Dr. Barr is employed by the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage as Special Advisor in polar matters.

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK

8.1 The documentation material’s original source is on a nitrate celluloid base, monochrome and tinted, and without audio track. The various components are incomplete and fragmentary in nature.

The condition of the various components varies to a certain extent, and the degradation process has begun across the board. Most of the material exhibits a high degree of physical wear, but the chemical degradation holds a relatively low and even level. At present, there is no acute danger of the material dissolving in the near future.

The material is being stored under good and stable conditions, in an environment that has been specially constructed and tailored for preservation of nitrate film. The temperature is maintained at 6º C, with a relative humidity of 48 %. The rate of change of the climate air is 100 %, at a rate of every second hour.

9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION

9.1 The documentary material in this connection consists of film. The material has different background with respect to origin and provenance. Most of the material has been in NFI’s archives for many years, and some of it has been deposited there by the Norwegian Polar Institute. Some of the material has previously been transferred to acetate base.

The material has been collected by subject and treated under the expression “collection”. It is subject to a preservation programme, with a new review for cataloguing and restoration. This work will be completed in the second half of 2004.

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by:

(Please print name)
Lars Westgaard, Filmpreservationist at the Film Archive, Norwegian Film Institute

(Signature)…… (Date)……