

# Ernest Shackleton

Ernest Shackleton was a famous polar explorer, who took part in three expeditions to the Antarctic and made many important scientific discoveries.

## Childhood

Ernest Henry Shackleton was born in Ireland on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1874. His father was Henry Shackleton, a landowner at the time, and his mother was Henrietta Gavan. Ernest's father began training to become a doctor when Ernest was six years old. Four years later, when his father had finished his training, the family moved to Sydenham, London, in search of better jobs.



## Education

Ernest was schooled at home until he was 11 when he began at Fir Lodge Preparatory School in Dulwich, in southeast London. At the age of 13, he went to Dulwich College.

Ernest was a keen reader. He particularly enjoyed reading about fictional adventures, which made him want to go on adventures himself. Although Ernest was very clever, he found school boring and did not enjoy learning about the world by reading about it. Ernest wanted to experience everything for himself.

## The Merchant Navy

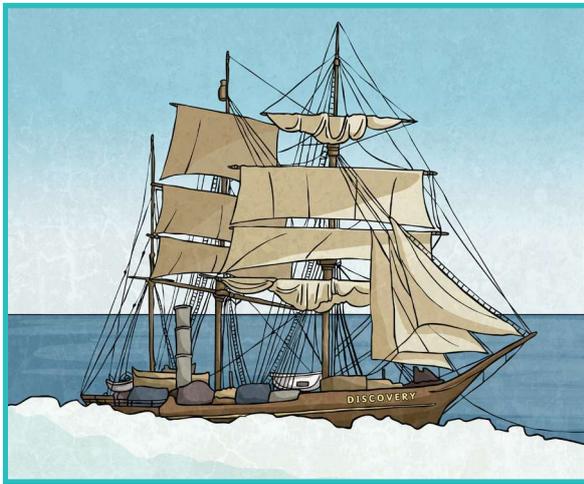
To be able to explore the world, Ernest left school at the age of 16 and joined the merchant navy. He spent four years learning how to sail before becoming a Second Mate or assistant. Four years later, Ernest became a Master Mariner. This meant that he was able to sail a British ship anywhere in the world. Although Ernest travelled to places around the world, he never saw the Antarctic – something he had always wanted to do.

## Expeditions

Ernest got the job of third officer to the National Antarctic Expedition's ship, 'Discovery'. This was to be a voyage of discovery led by Robert Falcon Scott and it would be Ernest's first expedition to the Antarctic. The team set sail on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1901, arriving at the Antarctic Coast over five months later.



With Scott and one other team member, Ernest trekked towards the South Pole in extremely difficult conditions, getting closer to the Pole than anyone had come before. Unfortunately, the team experienced many hardships during the expedition, including snow blindness, frostbite and illness. Ernest became very poorly so was sent home early on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1903, never having reached the South Pole.



Five years later, Ernest attempted his second Antarctic expedition and set sail aboard a ship named 'Nimrod' on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1908.

On this expedition, Ernest and his team climbed Mount Erebus – the second-highest volcano in Antarctica – and came closer to the South Pole than they had before (only 180 km from the Pole).

When Ernest returned home, he received an award from King Edward VII. A few months later, the King made him a knight – so he became Sir Ernest Shackleton.

Ernest was eager to go on another expedition so he put an advertisement in the newspaper asking for men to join him; more than 5,000 people applied. In 1914, Ernest selected a crew of 56 men, who were split between two ships named 'Endurance' and 'Aurora', which set sail on 8th August.

Conditions were slow and hazardous and on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1915, the ship 'Endurance' became stuck in a large sheet of ice. Ernest and his crew abandoned the ship and lived on top of the Antarctic ice for almost two years before they were finally rescued on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1916.

# Questions

1. **Unfortunately, the team experienced many hardships during the expedition...**

What does **hardships** mean? Tick one.

- severe suffering
- total ease
- minor difficulties
- complete success

2. Match the event to when it happened:

Ernest Henry Shackleton  
was born in Ireland.

31<sup>st</sup> July 1901

The ship 'Discovery' set  
sail.

15<sup>th</sup> February 1874

The ship 'Endurance'  
became stuck in a large  
sheet of ice.

19<sup>th</sup> January 1915

3. Name one thing that Ernest liked and one thing he disliked as a child.

---

4. Fill in the missing words:

To be able to explore the world, Ernest left school at the age of \_\_\_\_\_ and joined the \_\_\_\_\_, spending four years learning how to \_\_\_\_\_.

5. Find and copy a word or phrase which shows that Ernest was still keen to go on more expeditions after the 'Nimrod' expedition.

---

6. Why do you think that the King made Ernest a knight?

---



---



---

7. Summarise Ernest's final expedition in 30 words or less.

---

---

---

8. How do you think Ernest felt when he first visited Antarctica? Explain your answer.

---

---

---

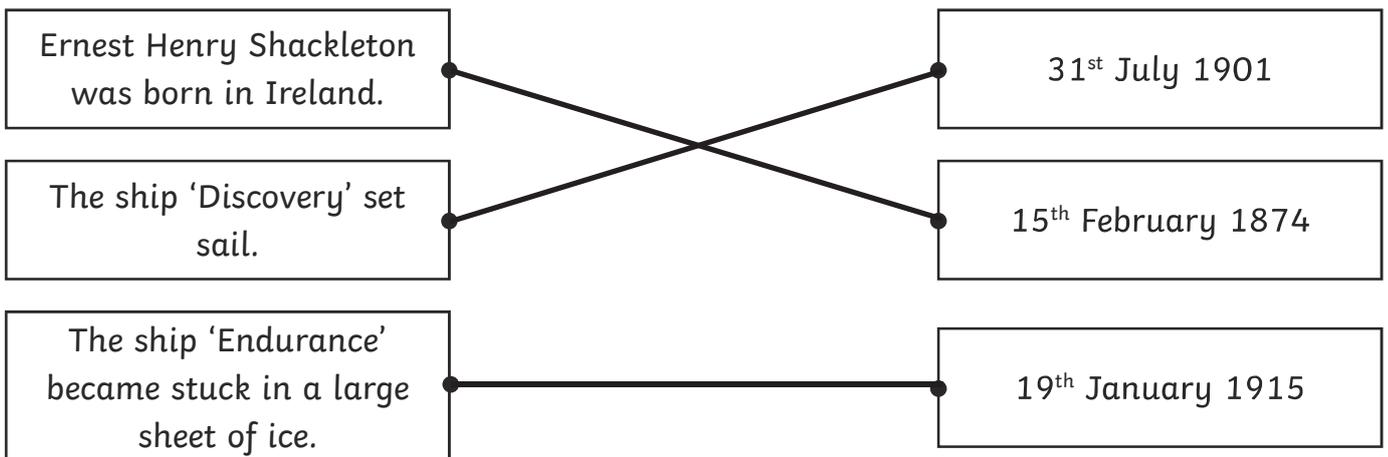
# Answers

## 1. Unfortunately, the team experienced many hardships during the expedition...

What does **hardships** mean? Tick one.

- severe suffering**
- total ease
- minor difficulties
- complete success

## 2. Match the event to when it happened:



## 3. Name one thing that Ernest liked and one thing he disliked as a child.

**Ernest liked reading.**

**Ernest disliked school/learning about the world by reading about it.**

## 4. Fill in the missing words:

To be able to explore the world, Ernest left school at the age of **16** and joined the **merchant navy**, spending four years learning how to **sail**.

## 5. Find and copy a word or phrase which shows that Ernest was still keen to go on more expeditions after the 'Nimrod' expedition.

**(Ernest was) eager (to go on another expedition)**

## 6. Why do you think that the King made Ernest a knight?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Ernest had completed something that many people never do, so he deserved the title of 'Sir' for his hard work.**

7. Summarise Ernest's final expedition in 30 words or less.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: In 1914, 'Endurance' and 'Aurora' set sail but conditions were slow and difficult 'Endurance' became stuck on an ice sheet meaning that the crew had to live on the Antarctic ice for almost two years before being rescued.**

8. How do you think Ernest felt when he first visited Antarctica? Explain your answer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Ernest would have been so pleased to have finally realised his dreams of visiting the Antarctic; he would have felt ecstatic.**