



Roald Amundsen

September 9th, 1910. The 19-man crew of the *Fram* relaxed as their ship lay docked at the Atlantic island of Madeira. The weather was warm, in contrast to the ship's destination – deep into the Arctic Circle to conduct a scientific survey. The crack crew, mainly Norwegian and including many veterans of polar voyages, were suddenly called on deck.

As a medical student, Amundsen neglected his work in order to prepare for life as a polar explorer. He toughened himself up by skiing across country for many hours without sleep.



Amundsen had been planning the expedition to Antarctica for a year, ever since hearing the devastating news that American explorer Robert Peary claimed to have reached the North Pole.

To the crew's surprise, a map of the Antarctic, not the Arctic, was pinned to the mast.

Next to it stood their leader, Roald Amundsen. "It is my intention to sail southwards, land a party on the southern continent and attempt to reach the South Pole," he declared. According to Lieutenant Frederick Gjertsen, "Most stood there with mouths agape, staring at the chief like so many question marks." Amundsen gave each man the chance to leave the ship.

Not one took up the offer. With a British expedition led by Robert Falcon Scott already far into southern waters, the race to the South Pole was on.

By 1910, Amundsen was already an experienced explorer. He had given up his studies to serve aboard polar whaling ships, and at the age of 25 he set off on his first Antarctic expedition (1897–99) on board the *Belgica*, which became the first ship to spend a winter in the continent. Four years later, Amundsen was at the other end of the Earth, commanding a converted trawler, the *Gjøa*, deep into Arctic waters. During the three year voyage, Amundsen did what his hero, Sir John Franklin, had not managed, finding a way through the deadly maze of Arctic Ocean icebergs to sail a Northwest Passage from the Atlantic into the Pacific Ocean.

The Gjøa navigates through the ice of the Arctic Circle. Having found a route through the Northwest Passage, Amundsen left his ship at Herschel Island and skied around 800km to Eagle City to send a telegram with news of the expedition's success.

Ten Explorers: Roald Amundsen

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Roald Amundsen's route through the Northwest Passage, 1903-06

