

Milestone Film presents

THE STORY OF AN IMMORTAL ADVENTURE

HERBERT G. PONTING'S

90° SOUTH

WITH SCOTT TO THE ANTARCTIC



A Milestone Film Release

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CREDITS:

Produced and Directed byHerbert G. Ponting
Photographed & Edited by.....Ponting
Forward by.....Vice-Admiral E.R.G.R. Evans
Commentary spoken by.....Ponting
Music DirectorW. L. Trytel
1912 release by.....Gaumont & Co.

England. 1933. Silent with Music Score and Narration. Black and White.

Shot on location in Antarctica, 1910-1912.

35mm to video. 1:33. 72 minutes.

Previously shown as

“WITH CAPTAIN SCOTT, RN. TO THE SOUTH POLE” (premiered October 19, 1911)

“WITH CAPTAIN SCOTT IN THE ANTARCTIC” (August, 1912)

“THE UNDYING STORY OF CAPTAIN SCOTT” (1913)

“THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE” (1924, distributor: New Era Films)

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SOME OF THE EXPEDITION MEMBERS:

*Robert Falcon Scott.....Captain, C.V.O., R.N.
E.R.G.R. EvansLieutenant R.N.
Victor L.A. CampbellLieutenant R.N.
*Henry R. BowersLieutenant R.I.M.
*Lawrence E.G. Oates.....Captain, 6th Inniskilling Dragoons
*Edward Adrian Wilson.....B.A., M.B., Chief of Science
*Staff Edgar Evans.....Petty Officer, R.N.
G. Murray LevickSurgeon, R.N.
Frank Debenham.....B.A., B.Sc., Geologist
Herbert G. Ponting.....Camera Artist
Cecil H. MearesIn Charge of Dogs
Apsley Cherry-GarrardB.A., Assistant Zoologist
Anton Omelchenko.....Groom
Dimitri Geroff.....Dog Driver

* the South Pole team



BACKGROUND:

"The factual film holds an extraordinary power over the dedicated cineaste. It somehow represents a purity, an integrity, to which the commercial entertainment film can never aspire."

—Kevin Brownlow, *THE WAR, THE WEST, AND THE WILDERNESS*

From the early days of the cinema, the travelogue was a popular audience attraction. After 1910, this category expanded to include exploration films such as Herbert Ponting's *WITH SCOTT TO THE ANTARCTIC* (1913); documentary reconstructions, like Edward S. Curtis' film on the Kwakiutl tribe, *IN THE LAND OF THE HEAD HUNTERS* (1914); and adventure epics, like Lowell Thomas' career-making blockbuster, *WITH LAWRENCE IN ARABIA* (1919).

With the end of World War I, great increases in mechanical inventions and new prosperity, the Golden Age of photographic exploration dawned. The success of Robert J. Flaherty's *NANOOK OF THE NORTH*, the enormous popularity of Martin and Osa Johnson's Pacific Island and African films, and the new light-weight cameras (especially Carl Akeley's brilliant invention which bore his name) pointed the way for the adventure films of Admiral Byrd's polar explorations, William Beebe's undersea voyages, Roy Chapman Andrews' discovery of dinosaur eggs in the Gobi Desert and Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's expeditions to Persia and Siam.

The films were inexpensive to produce, featured real life-and-death situations, and returned solid profits at the box office. Many, including NANOOK, Cooper and Schoedsack's CHANG and TABU were never meant to be seen as, nor were considered to be, what today we call "documentaries." Curtis and Flaherty showed the way for adventure films that would show a realism — an inner truth — that would go beyond the surface facts to present something more meaningful and poetic. As Flaherty wrote, "I am not going to make films about what the white man has made of primitive peoples. What I want to show is the former majesty and character of these people, while it is still possible — before the white man has destroyed not only their character, but the people as well."

It was the heyday of the hero, and these adventurer-filmmakers steered the country's imagination away from war and toward exotic lands and strange customs while becoming heroes themselves for their daring and artistry. Many of these films were box office hits and the New York Times regularly chose them for its "Ten Best Films of the Year" list. CHANG, in the first year of the Academy Awards, was one of three films nominated for "Artistic Quality of Production," along with SUNRISE and THE CIRCUS. It must have been a heady experience for Cooper and Schoedsack to be placed in the company of F. W. Murnau (who, with Flaherty, would later direct TABU) and Charlie Chaplin. With THE JAZZ SINGER (1928) came the need for the heavier and bulkier sound cameras and motion pictures became studio-bound for the most part. The transition to talking films was fast and furious—by the end of 1929 some 8,700 movie theaters were equipped to show "talkies." TABU, which was released with a "synchronized" music score, was one of the last major films to be shot "silent" and one of the last great adventure-exploration films for thirty years, until the rise of television, Jacques Cousteau and the National Geographic specials.

"We arrived within 11 miles of our old One Ton Camp with fuel for one last meal and food for two days. For four days we have been unable to leave the tent — the gale howling about us. We are weak, writing is difficult, but for my own sake I do not regret this journey, which has shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past. We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence, determined still to do our best to the last.... Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman." —Robert Falcon Scott, from his last diary entries

PRODUCTION HISTORY & THE BRITISH ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION:

In 1905, while Herbert Ponting was in England, he met Cecil Meares. Meares was enamored of polar exploration and lent Ponting a book entitled *Voyage of the Discovery*. It had been written by a young naval officer by the name of Robert Falcon Scott and detailed his earlier 1901-1904 Antarctic expedition. Ponting took the book with him when he journeyed to Russia in 1907. When Scott started to look for men for The British Antarctic Expedition in 1909, Meares' quickly volunteered and introduced Ponting to the leader. Captain Scott knew the scientific and promotional importance of photography to an expedition, and couldn't have asked for a better man than Ponting. The British Journal of Photography welcomed the selection of the famous photographer as "the first occasion on which an important scientific exploration has placed its arrangements for photography in the hands of an expert." Although Ponting had never shot moving

pictures before, he quickly mastered the art and provided some of the most astonishing polar images ever filmed.

In that same article in the British Journal of Photography, it was mentioned that Ponting's still cameras included a "Sibyl" with a "Tessar" f/4.5 lens along with a "Special B" camera. For cinematography, Ponting brought along a "Prestwich" as well as a "Newman Sinclair." It too was fitted with a Tessar lens. Newman Sinclair supplied the darkroom equipment for the processing of the movies. The famed filmmakers, the Lumiere brothers from France, supplied them with the film stock. Ironically, the article also mentions that Ponting would be shooting lantern slides for Scott's anticipated lectures after the expedition returned.

The expedition left London on the *Terra Nova*, in June 1910. Their first stop was to Australia and New Zealand, where supplies were taken on. It was there in Lyttleton, New Zealand that Ponting joined the crew. For several days of rough weather, Ponting suffered from severe sea sickness (as did most of the crew), but still managed to keep shooting and working. After sailing through the Ross Sea and passing the magnificent Great Ice Barrier, they landed at Cape Evans. There, they brought out the cargo and set up base for the winter. Ponting almost didn't make it past the first day when he decided to photograph a pack of killer whales and got too close. The orcas burst through the ice right at his feet and Ponting had to scramble for his life. Shooting in below-0° weather proved a great challenge to Ponting. If his bare fingers touched the metal of the camera when threading the film, his fingers were instantly frostbitten. Still, Ponting proved untiring in his efforts to record the expedition. The group invented a new word for standing still in the bitter cold while waiting to be photographed. It was, to "pont."

In February 1911, Scott received a letter announcing that the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, on hearing that Robert E. Peary had beaten him to the North Pole, had quickly switched plans and had now landed in the Bay of Whales by the Great Ice Barrier. Scott realized the great threat this posed since Amundsen was sixty miles closer to the Pole, had an easier trek, and had been able to land a great many dogs for the journey. Scott launched his polar expedition on October 24, 1911 using motor sledges, ponies and dogs. The motors quickly were abandoned after a week when they proved useless in the Antarctic climate and terrain. The Siberian ponies too were unfit for the kind of journey they were facing and tragically had to be shot. The dog teams were sent back at 83° south. On December 10, the eleven-man support crew and their sledges, returned back to camp leaving the five men to make the final assault on the pole. On January 16, just a day away from the Pole, Scott wrote: *"The worst has happened, or nearly the worst... About the second hour of the march Bowers' sharp eyes detected what he thought was a cairn."* It was the remains of Amundsen's camp. The better planned and equipped expedition had beaten them to the Pole. This discovery after a grueling sixty-nine day march was bitterly disappointing. But there were 800 miles still to go to return back to camp...

Scott's diary details a horrifying and utterly courageous account of the return journey. The weather took a turn for the worse as blizzards hit the small party. Petty Officer Evans had a bad fall and their pace slowed. By the middle of February, Evans died, having showed signs of a mental breakdown. Next, Captain Oates found himself in intolerable pain from frostbitten feet, but despite this, struggled on. But he knew that he was slowing down his comrades and on March 17th Scott wrote:

"Should this be found I want these facts recorded... We can testify to his bravery. He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint... He did not — would not — give up hope till the very end. He

was a brave soul... He woke in the morning — yesterday. It was blowing a blizzard. He said, "I am just going outside and may be some time."

Oates' last, brave words as he walked out to his death to save his friends have become immortalized in British history. The weather continued its merciless course and the three survivors were trapped in their tent for nine days. On March 29, Scott wrote:

"Every day we have been ready to start for our depot 11 miles away but outside the door of the tent, it remains a scene of whirling drift. I do not think we can hope for any better things now. We shall stick it out to the end but we are getting weaker, of course, and the end cannot be far. It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more. R. Scott. Last Entry. For Gods sake, look after our people."

Twelve months later in November 1912, the search party lead by the surgeon, Edward Atkinson discovered their tent. "It was an object partially snowed up and looking like a cairn. Before it were the ski sticks and in front of them a bamboo which probably was the mast of the sledge... Inside were the bodies of Captain Scott, Doctor Wilson and Lieutenant Bowers. Wilson and Bowers were found in the attitude of sleep, their sleeping-bags closed over their heads as they would naturally close them. Scott died later. He had thrown back the flaps of his sleeping-bag and opened his coat. The little wallet containing the three notebooks was under his shoulders and his arm flung across Wilson." Scott's diary and two undeveloped rolls of film helped Ponting tell the rest of the story.

In 1912, Ponting had sent back part of his footage and Gaumont, under exclusive license, showed the film as WITH CAPTAIN SCOTT TO THE SOUTH POLE. Just weeks later, the bodies of Scott and his friends were discovered and the film took on tragic proportions. In 1914, unhappy with Gaumont, Ponting purchased the rights to the film for more than £5,000 and reissued it using Scott's photographs of the Pole. For the following few years through World War I (where Oates' self-sacrifice obviously took on great meaning to the British troops), the film played to excellent success. The film again was re-edited by Ponting in 1923 as THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE. Throughout his life, Ponting remembered Scott saying to him after clowning with Oates before the camera as they left on their journey, "What fun it'll be when we're home again and see this at the cinema." Ponting spent the rest of his life making sure that Scott's memory would not be forgotten. This is the sound version that Herbert G. Ponting prepared from 1930-1933, costing £10,000. The soundtrack and animation of the stills took far longer and cost far more than planned, and Ponting gave much of himself in the preparation of the film. This around-the-clock effort and the film's lack of public attention, helped accelerate his failing health.

HERBERT G. PONTING
March 21, 1870-February 7, 1935

*I'll sing a little song, about one among our throng,
Whose skill in making pictures is not wanting.
He takes pictures while you wait, 'prices strictly moderate,'
I refer, of course, to our Professor Ponting.*

(Chorus)

*Then pont, Ponko, pont, and long may Ponko pont;
With his finger on the trigger of his 'gadget.'
For whenever he's around, we're sure to hear the sound*

Of his high-speed cinematographic ratchet.

*When he started in the ship he was d--ly sick,
And couldn't make a picture for a day or two;
But when he got about, we began to hear him shout,
'Please stand still for a moment while I take you.'*

*When at last we reached the ice, he landed in a trice,
And hurried off to photograph the whales O!
But the 'killers' heard the sound, and quickly turned around,
And nearly made a meal of poor old Ponko.
In the dreary winter night he fixed up his carbide light,
And took us round the world as quick as winkin'.
And his spicy little yarns, about foreign countries' charms,
Were as good as published in the 'Pink Un'.*

*Then pont, Ponko, pont, and long may Ponko pont;
With his finger on the trigger of his 'gadget.'
For whenever he's around, we're sure to hear the sound
Of his high-speed cinematographic ratchet.*

— Cecil H. Meares, in the expedition's newspaper, SOUTH POLAR TIMES, October 3, 1911

In 1910, Herbert George Ponting ("Ponko" to his friends in the expedition) was listed on the British Antarctic Expedition as "Camera Artist." It had been a long and twisting trail to that point in life. Ponting opened his book, *The Great White South* with the following words:

"Before going to the Far South with Captain Scott's South Pole Expedition, my life — save for six years' ranching and mining in Western America; a couple of voyages round the world; three years of travel in Japan; some months as war correspondent with the First Japanese Army during the war with Russia; and in the Phillippines during the American war with Spain; and save, too, for several years of travel in a score of other lands — had been comparatively uneventful."

This humorous modesty combined with a touch of pomposity was typical of the well-heeled and well-traveled Englishman. Ponting was descended from two families whose wealth included extensive property in Somerset and Devon. His father, Francis Ponting, became an extremely successful banker while very young and retired at the age of fifty-five. When he died in 1923 at the age of eighty-one, his estate was valued at the considerable amount of £45,000. Herbert was the second of eight children — four girls and four boys. In 1888, at the bequest of his father, Herbert entered the banking business. After four years of this, he decided he was not suited for the job and with a generous financial gift from his father, set out for America and the West Coast. He settled in Auburn, California where he bought a fruit farm and invested in gold-mining. In 1895, he married Mary Biddle Elliott, a pretty and socially well-connected bride. In 1897, she gave birth to their first child, Mildred. Two years later a son was born, Dick. By this time, Ponting's farm had fallen into financial difficulties (a recurring theme of Ponting's investments). At this point, the gold mine investment collapsed and the family found itself in deeper financial straits. In 1900, however, Herbert Ponting found a new career in photography. He was soon winning prestigious awards and had found a niche. In the next decade, he travelled the world and developed an international reputation. In 1905, Ponting left his family and never returned — something he regretted for the rest of his life. After he returned from the Scott expedition,

Ponting had little success. Although his book, *The Great White South* did very well and was continuously re-printed, the rest of his business efforts and inventions always ended in failure. Bouts of ill health followed Ponting from 1930 onward. Eventually, he died of heart disease in 1935. The net value of his estate was no more than £377 and his photographs and equipment had to be put up for auction to pay his debts.

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Milestone Film & Video

"Since its birth the Milestone Film & Video Co. has steadily become the industry's foremost boutique distributor of classic and art films — and probably the only distributor in America whose name is actually a guarantee of some quality."

— William Arnold, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

Milestone is a boutique distribution company with more than 13 years experience in art-house film distribution. The company has earned an unparalleled reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to Milestone's rediscovery, restoration and release of such important discoveries as Mikhail Kalatozov's award-winning *I am Cuba*, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, the company now occupies an honored position as one of the most influential independent distributors in the American film industry. In 1999, the *L.A. Weekly* chose Milestone as "Indie Distributor of the Year."

Amy Heller and Dennis Doros started Milestone in 1990 to bring out the best films of yesterday *and* today. The company has released such remarkable new films as Manoel de Oliveira's *I'm Going Home*, Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?*, Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi*, and Takeshi Kitano's *Fireworks (Hana-Bi)*.

Milestone's re-releases have included restored versions of Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass and Chang*, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso*, Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity* and Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Woman in the Dunes* and *Antonio Gaudí*. Milestone is also working with the Mary Pickford Foundation on a long-term project to preserve, re-score and release the best films of the legendary silent screen star. In recent years, Milestone has re-released beautifully restored versions of Frank Hurley's *South: Ernest Shackleton and the Endurance Expedition*, Kevin Brownlow's *It Happened Here* and *Winstanley*, Lotte Reiniger's animation masterpiece, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, Michael Powell's *The Edge of the World* (a Martin Scorsese presentation), Jane Campion's *Two Friends*, Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Wide Blue Road* (a Jonathan Demme and Dustin Hoffman presentation), Conrad Rooks' *Siddhartha* and Rolando Klein's Mexican classic, *Chac*.

Since its beginning, Milestone has had a fruitful collaboration with some of the world's major archives including the British Film Institute, UCLA Film & Television Archive, George Eastman House, Museum of Modern Art, Library of Congress, Nederlands Filmmuseum and the Norsk Filminstitut. In August 2000 the Film Society of Lincoln Center in New York premiered Milestone's 10th Anniversary Retrospective. During the New York run and the nationwide tour that followed, all revenues from retrospective screenings were donated to four major archives in the United States and England to help restore films that might otherwise be lost.

In 2003–2004, Milestone will be releasing an important series of great silent films restored by the world's foremost film historians and preservationists, Photoplay Productions. These stunning versions, never before available in the United States, include the horror classic *The Phantom of the Opera*; André Antoine's early neorealist adaptation of Emile Zola's *La Terre*; and an astonishing historical epic of Polish independence by Raymond Bernard, *The Chess Player*. Video highlights for this year also include Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle and Buster Keaton's *The Cook & Other Treasures*, and a special DVD series of incredible animation including *Cut-Up: The Films of Grant Munro*; *Norman McLaren: The Collector's Edition*; and *Winsor McCay: The Master Edition*.

In theaters, Milestone will be releasing Tareque Masud's remarkable *The Clay Bird* from Bangladesh and a gorgeously restored version of E.A. Dupont's *Piccadilly*, starring the even *more* gorgeous, Anna May Wong.

Milestone received a Special Archival Award in 1995 from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I am Cuba*. Eight of the company's films — Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Edward S. Curtis's *In the Land of the War Canoes*, Mary Pickford's *Poor Little Rich Girl*, Lon Chaney's *The Phantom of the Opera*, Clara Bow's *It*, Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*, and Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schodsack and Marguerite Harrison's *Grass* — are listed on the Library of Congress's National Film Registry.

Cindi Rowell, director of acquisitions, has been with Milestone since 1999. In 2003 Nadja Tennstedt joined the company as director of international sales.

“Milestone Film & Video is an art-film distributor that has released some of the most distinguished new movies (along with seldom-seen vintage movie classics) of the past decade”
— Stephen Holden, *New York Times*

Film Notes by Amy Heller & Dennis Doros