Notes

Joseph Shackleton in Iceland, 1861

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ABSTRACT. Joseph Shackleton, a member of the same family as Sir Ernest Shackleton, visited Iceland with two friends in 1861. They travelled in *Arcturus*, a Danish vessel that ran a scheduled service in summer. They visited the two main 'attractions,' namely Thingvellir and the geysers. Shackleton's manuscript account of the trip indicates that tourism was developed by such an early date and that the infrastructure for it was in place and efficient. His account also provides interesting information concerning contemporary Iceland.

In 1998, this writer published a note on a visit to Iceland in 1878 by a group of persons, which included the famous novelist Anthony Trollope, on board a vessel named *Mastiff* (Stone 1998; Trollope 1878). A conclusion was that tourism in Iceland had, by that date, reached a high level of organisation, especially concerning the arrangements for visitors to see the two main sites of interest, the ancient assembly ground of the Icelanders, Thingvellir, and the famous geysers.

Support for this contention comes from a fascinating account of an earlier visit to that country by a person whose surname will be familiar to all readers of *Polar Record*. This was Joseph Fisher Shackleton who was a member of the same family as Sir Ernest. This Shackleton was born in 1832 in Ireland and worked in the family flour business at Anna Liffey Mills, Lucan, Co. Dublin, where he lived from 1859. He had a taste for northern travel, as he visited Iceland once and Scandinavia. He died in 1908. Shackleton's visit to Iceland took place in 1861, and his manuscript memorandum on it is preserved by Jonathan Shackleton, who is his great-grandson and the Shackleton family historian. It was dated 13 March 1862, comprises 37 densely written, and difficult to read, foolscap pages, and is untitled (Shackleton 1862).

In contrast to Trollope's trip, which was essentially an expedition cruise on board a privately owned vessel, Shackleton relied on public transport. This was the steamer *Arcturus*, a Danish vessel that provided a regular service in the summer from Copenhagen to Reykjavik via Grangemouth on the Firth of Forth in Scotland and Thorshavn in the Faroes. Akureyri was also visited on Shackleton's voyage but it was not part of the normal schedule.

Shackleton appears to have decided to take the trip at short notice once he had discovered the details of the *Arcturus* service. He commented that, as a businessman, he had to have a reasonable prospect of returning in a fixed time and could not indulge himself in this respect as had Lord Dufferin who owned his own vessel and who 'had the whole summer at his disposal.' This is a reference to the Irish peer the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava whose famous voyage in his yacht *Foam*, and whose subsequent book, *Letters from high latitudes*, did much to establish the fashion for northern travel by the wealthy in the late nineteenth century (Dufferin and Ava 1857).

Shackleton was accompanied by Alfred Webb, who had a printing business and later became a relative of his by marriage, and by Isaac Carroll, who was a leading Irish botanist. Shackleton considered that three 'was a very good number to compose a party,' since it provided for a two-to-one majority in the case of disagreement and 'at a pinch the whole party can fit in one bed' (Shackleton 1862: 1).

Preparations seem to have taken little time. Equipment did not, 'imprudently,' include a tent, but they did take 'trinkets as presents,' because the habit of 'pitching money about, has invariably the effect of making rogues and beggars of the inhabitants' (Shackleton 1862: 2). They delayed provisioning for the land part of their trip until arrival at Reykjavik, and in the event 'clubbed together with other travellers who had brought a greater variety from England.' Shackleton took his 'fowling piece,' Webb his flute, and Carroll his 'botanists portfolio.'

The party boarded *Arcturus*, a ship of 160 tons, at Grangemouth on 8 June 1861, and Shackleton seems to have been dismayed by the congested nature of the accommodation. There was one saloon in which the 10 passengers slept. These were presumably first-class since there were 15 other passengers elsewhere in the ship. Each had a berth, but the cabin boy slept 'on the floor.' The area exclusive of the berths was a mere '5 feet by 6' and 'our only chance of breathing was by keeping the door open all night.' Food, however, was plentiful and good at a price of 3 shillings *per diem* (Shackleton 1862: 3, 5).

Arcturus made a rapid passage to the Faroes, in rough weather, and sighted the islands on 11 June. Shackleton had, in contrast to Trollope (Stone 1998: 146), read extensively concerning the places to be visited, and his manuscript included an interesting account of the Faroes, noting that 17 were inhabitable, each lofty and 'rising out of the sea.' Arriving at Thorshavn, the party went ashore. It was 'a queer looking place' but, from his other comments, Shackleton clearly liked it and the people, who were 'generally good looking.' He took professional note of the primitive water mills for grinding grain, visited

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the 'Thing' House, and observed the grass roofing of the houses and the small fort. He included a hilarious account of the efforts of its garrison to fire salutes for visiting Danish royalty (Shackleton 1862: 3–9).

But 'we were bound for Iceland,' and *Arcturus* sailed after a stay of 21 hours. On 14 June, the first peak appeared, to be followed, as the day went on, by more 'snowy' mountains. Smoke was also visible, and the Icelanders on board, one of whom was the head of 'the University of Iceland' and 'the very image of a Dutch burgomaster,' pointed out that this was the product of a volcanic eruption. *Arcturus* passed through the Vestmann Islands, 'heaps of cinders,' and arrived at Reykjavik on 15 June with 'eight of us Britishers' eager 'for a gallop to the Geysirs' (Shackleton 1862: 4, 9–11).

Shackleton then digressed in his writing to include a lengthy account of the country, devoting much attention to the volcanoes and wondering why it was permanently inhabited at all in view of the perpetual threat they posed. He noted the great 1766 and 1783 eruptions and quoted almost *verbatim* from Dufferin's book with regard to them (Shackleton 1862: 11–16; Dufferin and Ava 1857). The deleterious effects of both eruptions were felt in northern Europe while, in Iceland, the second was catastrophic, and the resulting illnesses killed a quarter of the population (Hamblyn 2001: 46–56).

Returning to his narrative, Shackleton remarked that they only had five days to see the geysers and what we could 'of this wonderful island.' *Arcturus* was anchored near a French frigate, which was ostensibly on duties relating to the fisheries but was actively concerned to guarantee supplies of sulphur, then one of the main products of Iceland, in the event of war. Shackleton included a sympathetic description of Reykjavik, noting that there were few streets and no wheeled vehicles. A visit was paid to the offshore island, also visited by Trollope, where an eider duck farm was located. Shackleton was forced to use Latin when talking to the owner, since 'he knew as little of English or French as we did of Icelandic or Danish.' Preparations for the expedition to the geysers seem to have been made with astonishing efficiency, indicating that this was not an unusual activity. The day of departure was a Sunday and the party was anxious to be away before any 'Sabbatharians' were 'out of bed.'

A considerable cavalcade was involved. There were some 30 ponies, eight passengers, the Captain of *Arcturus*, and four Icelandic guides. The weather was perfect. There was a 'cloudless sky,' which appears to have continued for the whole journey. Shackleton was entranced with the scenery and the qualities of the ponies, which were 'perfection.' Despite this being a frequented route, there was virtually no trace of a track over the lava fields that constituted much of the way. Ptarmigan were shot, forming an 'agreeable addition to our cabin beef & biscuits,' and, in his account, this led to a description of the wildlife, including the reindeer that were introduced from Lapland in 1790. He noted that polar bears came 'on Greenland ice' but not as frequently as formerly, and repeated the old story, which he appears to have believed, about foxes descending bird cliffs in a chain each holding in its teeth the tail of the one in front.

The trip was not without incident, however, and Shackleton pointed out that riding was the most dangerous part of a tour to Iceland. There was simply no alternative. Some believed that one could not even walk because of 'the roughness of the ground.' Carroll fell off his pony and would have 'been killed on the spot' if he had not been riding slowly at the time. But 'judicious application of brandy both internally & externally' assisted his recovery.

The party reached Thingvellir in good time and inspected the area in detail. Those without tents stayed the night in the Lutheran Church, exactly as did Trollope's party. In the evening, short visits were paid to the site of the 'Althing' — producing the comment that when in Europe there was 'feudal despotism,' here there were 'free parliaments' — and to the hill of laws and the pool of execution, where women convicted of capital crimes were drowned. Shackleton does not indicate how the equivalent men were dealt with beyond the cryptic remark that this fate may have been deemed too 'lenient for them'(Shackleton 1862: 16–24).

On the following day's journey, he was enthusiastic in describing the scenery. It was 'beautiful & striking' and 'really enchanting.' There were delightful forests of dwarf birches, verdant meadows, blue lakes, and a clear sky. It was not to be surpassed 'even in Switzerland.' *En route*, 'a great column of steam' could be seen some miles off. This was the Great Geyser in eruption, and was imposing even at that distance. The party met a caravan of travelling Icelanders 'sheltering from the heat of the noon day sun.' He noted that they were trading between seaports and the interior, and that their wares were dried fish.

After several hours of hard riding the party approached the geysers but, 'tired as we were,' there was competition concerning who should arrive first, and 'a great steeple chase' took place. The 'honor of his country' was sustained by Webb, who reached the goal 'neck & neck' with one of the others. Shackleton gave a detailed description of the area and provided information concerning the number of geysers present. He noted that the Great Geyser only erupted approximately every 36 hours and mentioned that Strokur could be induced to erupt by tipping 'a few cartloads of sods' into it. This was duly done, as it was for Trollope's party (Stone 1998: 147), and it was clearly an activity with which the guides were familiar.

The party stayed at the geysers until the last possible moment in hopes of seeing the Great Geyser erupt at close quarters, but it did not oblige before they commenced their return. While waiting, they wandered about, washed clothes, cooked food in the hot springs, and generally killed time. The return journey was conducted 'at full speed' and they reached Reykjavik the following afternoon to find *Arcturus* getting up steam. Barely having time to inspect the College, the printing press, and the public library, as well as to purchase the inevitable 'mementos &

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curiosities,' they scrambled aboard (Shackleton 1862: 24–30).

This is the point at which Shackleton's and Trollope's journeys differ. The latter returned directly to Britain from Reykjavik, while *Arcturus* proceeded on a northerly course in order to visit Akureyri, on Iceland's northern coast. This provided the opportunity, if only at sea, for a stay of a few hours north of the Arctic Circle. Akureyri was reached 40 hours after leaving Reykjavik, which was 'very creditable to the Captain,' who had to rely more on his sounding line than on his chart. The sea was absolutely calm.

Arcturus remained at Akureyri, where there were only some 50 wooden houses, for two days discharging a cargo of barley, 'or some such grain,' and equipment such as spinning wheels, while taking on lava as ballast and 100 ponies as 'a trading speculation.' By this time Shackleton was as enamoured of these 'capital little fellows' as anyone who has ever ridden one seems to be. They only cost £3 to £4 each in Iceland.

Shackleton's intention had been to visit Lake Myvatn, 'about 50 or 60 miles to the Eastward of us,' but due to a misunderstanding with guides and because some of his companions were now 'lazy or knocked up,' this did not take place. The two days were spent 'very agreeably.' While Carroll 'half killed' himself botanising on the snow-clad mountains, Shackleton took the opportunity of making more thorough observations of the people than he had been able to before. The customs of greeting and departing, which involved much kissing, were awkward for him because he had not much practice 'at this sort of thing.' Moreover, when the men became inebriated, instead of 'breaking . . . heads as the Irish do,' they staggered about 'in a maudlin manner caressing & kissing one another.' The women were good-looking but 'none had the fiery touch-me-not eyes of our Irish girls.' Shackleton also purchased a dog, of the 'Esquimaux' variety but smaller, and observed that it was puzzled at home in Ireland by restraints such as 'walls & policemen' (Shackleton 1862: 24–35).

The voyage to Grangemouth was swift despite losing a day in the Faroes due to fog, and they arrived on 1 July. Shackleton concluded his account by praising the Danish sailors with regard to their 'good conduct & honesty.' They were superior to British sailors in this respect, but not perhaps 'for hardihood & pluck in war or extreme danger' (Shackleton 1862: 35–37).

A number of conclusions may be drawn from this brief survey. The first is that Shackleton was an astute observer. He provided much interesting information on Iceland and its society in the early 1860s, including confirmation of the well-organised nature of its 'tourist industry,' and on its communications overseas. At the same time he gave insights into the activities engaged in by visitors to the country and confirmed the general point that tourists seem to retain the same behaviour patterns over the generations. Secondly, Shackleton was a very entertaining writer. Although his account was unpolished and obviously written in haste, he had a tongue-in-cheek wit that is most attractive. Moreover, he interweaved fact and narrative in a way that shows he could have achieved much if he had taken up the pen professionally. A third point is that Shackleton appears to have had all the family robustness later exemplified in his illustrious relative. Riding in Iceland was, and is, hard work, and for him to have contemplated a ride of at least 100 miles from Akureyri to Lake Myvatn in a mere 48 hours shows that he was not daunted by the effort involved. Moreover, he seems to have been a thoroughly good companion and one trusts that those who travelled with him in 1861 enjoyed the journey as much as he obviously did.

Shackleton's account should be read by all with Icelandic interests or with those in the history of northern tourism, for which it is an important primary source from an early date. The text of the manuscript will be published in a future issue of *Polar Record*, and a copy of it has been placed in the Archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

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German Antarctic Expedition, 1873–74

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ABSTRACT. In late February/early March 1874, the members of Eduard Dallman's German 'Grönland' Expedition erected a commemorative plaque at Potter Cover, King George Island, South Shetland Islands. This historic monument was previously noted by a four-man party in 1949.

The interesting paper on the polar voyages of Captain Eduard Dallman (Barr and others 2004) omits mention of the commemorative plaque that Dallman erected in late February/early March 1874 at Potter Cove, King George Island, South Shetland Islands, while in command of the whaling ship *Groenland*.

On 30 July 1949, my four-man party from Admiralty Bay with two dog teams visited Potter Cove, where we came upon a 'weather-beaten post bearing the names of the members of the German 'Grönland' Expedition of 1874, stencilled on a copper plaque. On the shore was a big iron cauldron, in which blubber had been rendered down, and nearby were strewn planks and the vertebrae of whales, bleached, half-buried in the snow' (Hattersley-Smith 1951: 71). Nearby there was an unoccupied Argentine refuge hut, erected in January 1948 and called 'Jubany.'

The *Groenland* plaque is an historic monument and deserves mention as such.

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