

## The Saga of Robert F. Scott's Matches

History records the name of Roald Amundsen. He was the first to negotiate the fabled Northwest Passage (1903-1906) and had intended to be the first to reach the North Pole. But, as Fate would have it, Robert Perry had anticipated him in that endeavor and reached it before him. Amundsen then turned his attention to the South Pole, which no one had yet gotten to. After a dash by dog team and skis from the Bay of Whales (an inlet of the Ross Sea), on December 14, 1911, Amundsen became the first man in History to stand at the South Pole...just 35 days before the arrival of Robert F. Scott.

Robert Falcon Scott was a British naval officer and explorer. He made two notable expeditions to Antarctica. On the first (1901-1904), he sounded the Ross Sea, discovered the Edward VII Peninsula, surveyed the coast of Victoria Land, and made a long, important exploring trip on the Antarctic continent, itself, setting a new "farthest south" record. Upon his return to England, he was promoted to captain and wrote an account of his expedition, *The Voyage of the "Discovery"* (1905).

On his second voyage (1910), he was in search of the South Pole. His ship, *Terra Nova*, reached its base on the Ross Sea in 1911, and in November he started southward on foot toward the pole. Scott and his four companions pulled their heavy sledges by hand across the high polar plateau, in sub-zero weather the entire way.

When Scott eventually reached the South Pole on January 18, 1912, it was only to find bitter disappointment. Amundsen had already been there, just a few weeks ahead of him. On their retreat, the heroic party was beset by illness, lack of food, frostbite, and blizzards. All five men died only a few miles from their depot.

When their bodies were discovered 45 years later by the United States' Operation Deepfreeze, Scott's matchbox [shown here] was recovered, along with his valuable records. In the matchbox were wax-like matches, apparently specially made for the expedition, all intact, still ready to ignite. They had lain in the snow and ice for 45 years...waiting.

[Reprinted from *RMS Bulletin*, March/April 1999]

Information courtesy of Rich Greene



Above: the metal matchbox belonging to Robert Falcon Scott

Below: the wax-like matches, intact, from the above box

