



Frozen in Time

PRESERVATION AT THE END OF THE EARTH

That this congress record its opinion that the exploration of the Antarctic regions is the greatest piece of geographical exploration still to be undertaken. That in view of the additions to knowledge in almost every branch of science, which would result from such a scientific exploration, the Congress recommends that the scientific societies throughout the world should urge in whatever way seems to them most effective, that this work should be undertaken before the close of the century.

—SIXTH INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL CONGRESS, 1895

by GUS ROXBURGH

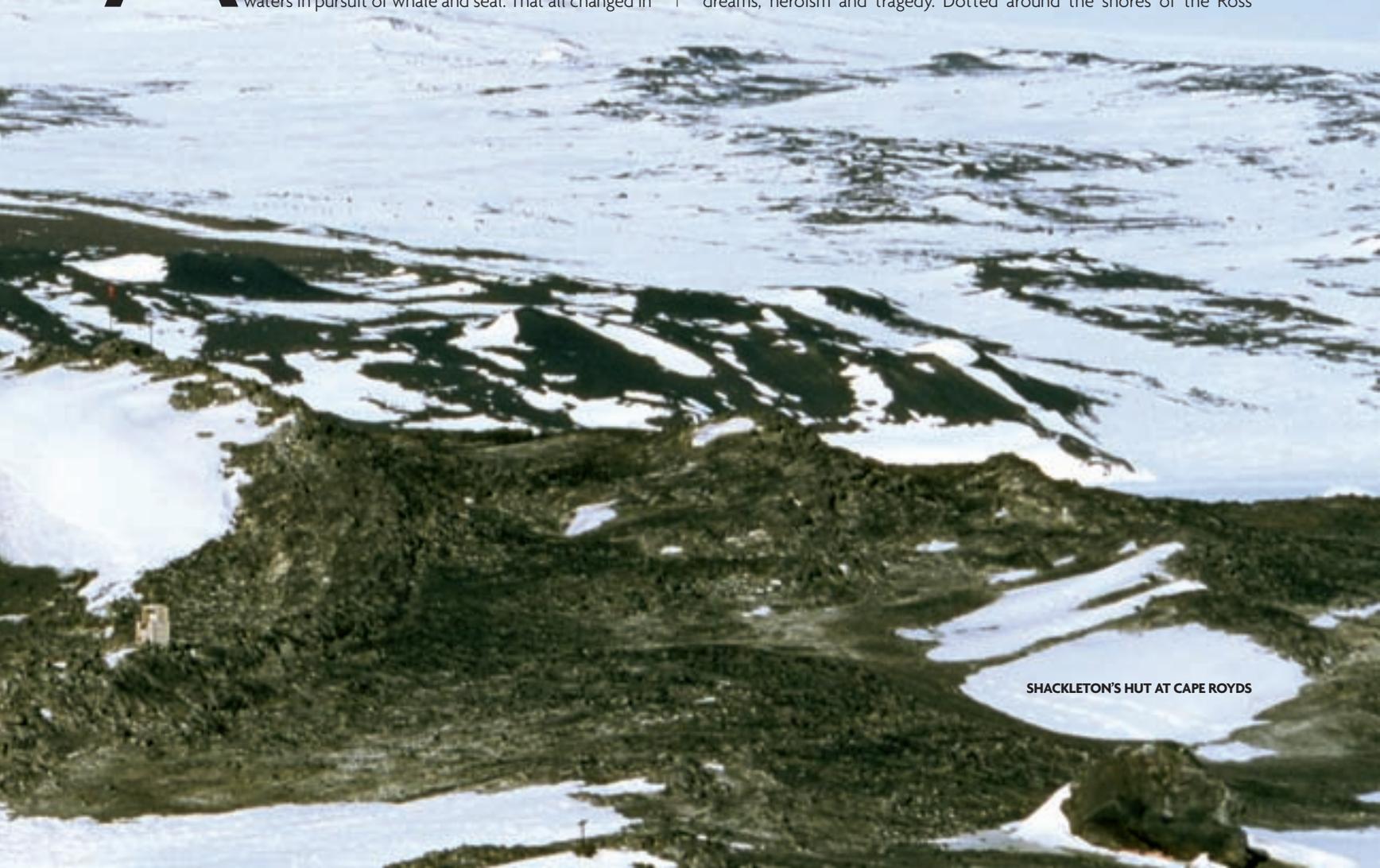
July 1895, when, at the Sixth International Geographical Congress in London, Antarctica was declared the greatest unclaimed geographical prize of the day.

Their proclamation ushered in what would come to be known as the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration. Over the course of two decades, dozens of expeditions set off for the land at the bottom of the world, hoping to be the first to set foot not only on Antarctica, but at the South Pole, one of the last great “undones.” In pursuit of a dream, men such as Robert Falcon Scott, Ernest Shackleton, and Roald Amundsen endured almost inconceivable hardships to one day become luminaries in the annals of exploration.

Beyond some of the greatest stories of discovery and survival ever told, these explorers left physical reminders of their feats. Some 4,800 kilometers due south of New Zealand, four expedition huts built by these intrepid adventurers still stand, each a repository of hopes and dreams, heroism and tragedy. Dotted around the shores of the Ross

At the close of the nineteenth century, Antarctica remained the only continent on Earth that had yet to feel the imprint of humankind. Until that time, only the heartiest of men had even spied her frozen wastes at a distance as they combed Antarctica’s ice-choked waters in pursuit of whale and seal. That all changed in

SHACKLETON'S HUT AT CAPE ROYDS





**ERNEST SHACKLETON, ROBERT
FALCON SCOTT, AND EDWARD
A. WILSON ON THE 1901-
1904 NATIONAL ANTARCTIC
EXPEDITION**

Sea, the huts are doubly significant in that they make Antarctica the only continent on Earth where humankind's first dwellings still exist. Each is a poignant monument to the human passion for discovery; each faces destruction wrought by the most hostile climate on the planet.

The Ross Sea was an ideal launch point for an Antarctic expedition, being the southernmost place a ship could reach during the short Austral summer in January or February—when the sea ice that embraces the continent each year breaks up. On arrival the men would erect prefabricated huts, retreating into them in March as temperatures plummeted and the days grew short. Six months later, with the arrival of spring, they would emerge from the huts to head south on their quests for glory.

There were six great expeditions to this side of the continent during that Heroic Age. The first was the British Antarctic Expedition (1898–1900) led by the ex-patriot Norwegian, Carsten Borchgrevink. Although Borchgrevink's expedition was riven with personality problems and failed to achieve any major geographical conquests, it was the first to spend the long, dark winter in Antarctica—ten men with a continent to themselves, living in a tiny, cramped hut with another hut for their supplies, both clinging to a windswept spit of land at remote Cape Adare in the northern reaches of the Ross Sea. Today, those weather-beaten huts still stand sentinel at Cape Adare. Surrounded by a lingering ambience of futility and loneliness, they are a timeless memorial to that first Antarctic winter.

The second expedition to the Ross Sea was the National Antarctic Expedition (1901–1904) led by the British naval

officer Captain Robert Falcon Scott. Scott ventured further south into the Ross Sea, establishing his base on Ross Island, on the edge of the Ross Ice Shelf. Here his team erected the Discovery Hut on a rocky promontory they named Hut Point, which overlooked a small harbor. The hut was beautifully sited with the smoking volcano Mt. Erebus behind and the Trans Antarctic Mountains shimmering like a mirage across McMurdo Sound in front. Although Scott's men failed to reach the South Pole, they made a record journey south, penetrating the barrier of the Trans Antarctic Mountains and reaching the Polar Plateau for the first time, thus blazing a path to the Pole for those who dared to follow.

Today, the Discovery Hut looks somewhat incongruous and forlorn against the backdrop of Antarctica's unofficial "capital," the American base at McMurdo Station. A sprawling cluster of barracks, oil tanks, laboratories, and vehicles just 300 meters from Scott's hut, McMurdo is home to some 1,200 scientists, soldiers, and support staff. Although easy access has made the Discovery the most visited of the Heroic Age huts, the structure itself is still in reasonably good condition. Inventories taken of its contents, however, reveal that many of the now-valuable artifacts left by the explorers have gone missing over the years.

One of the men on Scott's expedition, Ernest Shackleton, led a third expedition to the Ross Sea, the British Antarctic Expedition of 1907–1909. Shackleton's ship was prevented from reaching Hut Point due to thick sea ice, and they established a base some 48 kilometers north along the coast of Ross Island at Cape Royds. Here they built a hut on a picturesque headland looking north over the sea ice, and surrounded by a raucous colony of Adelie penguins. From Cape Royds, Shackleton led a desperate push south but eventually turned his team back just 156 kilometers from the Pole, when dwindling supplies and bad weather threatened their safe return. It was a decision that has subsequently been called the finest ever made in the history of Antarctic exploration and typified a man his comrades called "the Boss."

The hut at Cape Royds is still surrounded by thousands of Adelie penguins, yet it retains a sense of dignity befitting the remarkable efforts of Shackleton and his men. Inside, one senses that members of the expedition have just stepped outside. Supplies are stacked neatly on shelves and pots still stand on the stove. Portraits of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra hang on the wall. Touches of humanity reveal the humor of the men who lived there. Painted on the wall are the words "Wild and Joyce, painters, bookbinders, etc. Gentlemen only"—a reference to the "Rogues Retreat" where expedition members Ernest Joyce and Frank Wild printed *Aurora Australis*, the first book to be published in Antarctica.



ON JANUARY 4, 1911, SCOTT'S SHIP TERRA NOVA REACHED MCMURDO SOUND BUT BECAME TRAPPED IN PACK ICE, PREVENTING THE EXPEDITION FROM REACHING HUT POINT, WHERE THE DISCOVERY TEAM HAD STAYED TEN YEARS BEFORE. SCOTT CHOSE TO ERECT HIS HUT AT CAPE EVANS, BELOW, HALFWAY BETWEEN HUT POINT AND CAPE ROYDS.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY THE ANTARCTIC HERITAGE TRUST (3)





BONNIE BURNHAM/WMF

TODAY, A SPRAWLING CLUSTER OF BARRACKS, OIL TANKS, LABORATORIES, AND VEHICLES THAT COMPOSE THE AMERICAN BASE AT MCMURDO, LINE THE WATERFRONT JUST 300 METERS FROM SCOTT'S DISCOVERY HUT, VISIBLE IN THE DISTANCE. A CROSS DEDICATED TO THE EXPLORER WHO PERISHED WHILE RETURNING FROM THE SOUTH POLE LOOMS IN THE FOREGROUND.

Outside, however, the harsh Antarctic environment has taken its toll on the structure. The weather-beaten hut is surrounded by abandoned packing cases—their contents strewn about the snow-covered site alongside the smashed remains of stables, kennels, and a garage built for Antarctica's first car, an Arrol Johnson bought by Shackleton's team, who hoped it might help ferry them to the Pole.

Scott also led the fourth expedition to the Ross Sea, the Terra Nova Expedition of 1910–1913, the goal of which was to reach the South Pole. On January 4, 1911, the Terra Nova reached McMurdo Sound. However, pack ice prevented the expedition from reaching Hut Point, where the Discovery expedition stayed ten years earlier. Scott chose Cape Evans, also on Ross Island, as his winter quarters, nearly halfway between Hut Point and Cape Royds. Here, against the stunning blue-white cliffs of the Barnes Glacier, Scott built the hut he later declared to be “the finest residence that has been erected in the polar regions.”

Unfortunately for Scott, a fifth expedition also set off from the Ross Sea that summer, led by the Norwegian Arctic explorer, Roald Amundsen. The race for the Pole was on.

Man-hauling sleds full of gear, Scott's five-man party slogged their way toward the Pole. As they neared the seemingly elusive target on January 16, 1912, they noticed tracks in the snow made by sledges and skis, and numerous fresh paw prints. In the distance, they spotted what appeared to be a waving flag. Upon their arrival, their hearts sank. There, at the Geographical South Pole was a small green tent containing a note. The famed Norseman and his party had reached the Pole some 35 days earlier with a team of Greenland sled dogs. The tragic tale of Scott's expedition remains one of the most haunting in exploration. Having found themselves second to the Pole, Scott and his men set off on their return journey in the face of incredible cold, relentless blizzards, and starvation, only to perish on the 20th of March, just 18 kilometers short of a supply depot.

Today, Scott's hut at Cape Evans is surrounded by drifts of snow. Inside, the explorer's desk stands in the corner, an old London Illustrated News casually laid upon it. The dining table, where Scott celebrated his last birthday, commands the center of the hut; a barricade of packing cases separates the officers' area from that reserved for enlisted men. Supplies are stacked in the kitchen area and expedition photographer Herbert Ponting's darkroom still contains his chemicals and plates. Outside, abandoned sleds lean against the hut walls; the skeleton of one of their dogs lies like a ghostly reminder of the fate of its masters.

Though Shackleton failed to be the first to attain the South Pole, he returned to Antarctica to lead the Imperial Trans Antarctic Expedition of 1914–1917, which planned to cross the continent from the Weddell Sea to Ross Island via the Pole. Yet, the Pole would elude him once again. Within weeks of the expedition's arrival in the Weddell Sea, their ship, *Endurance*, became trapped in pack ice, where she remained for nearly a year before being crushed by ice. After camping for months on ice floes, Shackleton and his men made a perilous 160-kilometer journey in open boats to Elephant Island. From there, Shackleton and five others set out in an eight-meter-long whaler, the *James Caird*,

Who Speaks for Antarctic Heritage?

The modest wooden huts, built on the brink of the forbidding Antarctic continent to lodge the expedition parties of the “heroic age” explorers who first set foot there a century ago, have a commanding presence today that their builders could not have foreseen. Each of the four huts tells the story of the dramatic attempts to vanquish a hostile environment and establish a beachhead on Earth’s last terra incognita. What the explorers left behind speaks to us compellingly today as a reminder of what they wrote and did. The huts evoke the spirits of the men who lived for as much as two years in these self-contained time capsules and then left them behind forever.

Since 1987 the New Zealand-based Antarctic Heritage Trust (AHT) has acted as a nongovernmental steward for the future of the huts. When this effort began, the remote wooden buildings were desolate, unprotected and exposed to the elements, with their doors swinging open in the wind, and ice formed from windblown snow filling their interiors. Today, the huts are on the brink not of total loss, but of rebirth. The listing of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s hut on the World Monuments Watch list this year signals the beginning of a campaign to restore them and create greater awareness that these fortuitous survivors are treasures that commemorate the great deeds of a past era.

As tourists begin to visit Antarctica and their numbers increase, intriguing questions arise as to how the huts should be preserved for the future. Until now, efforts to save the huts have been anchored in research, with the New Zealand government providing the necessary logistic support. Now, the invitation for wider international support may enhance the close bonds between these cultural treasures and the country that has protected them.

Antarctica belongs to no one and no country can claim its territory. The Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1961, calls for the protection of the huts but provides no means to do so. The World Heritage Convention, the key international instrument for heritage protection, requires that listed sites be nominated by a national state that owns or claims responsibility for them. The World Heritage Convention has no mechanism for listing sites that fall under no one’s sovereignty or for sites that a sovereign government does not wish to nominate.

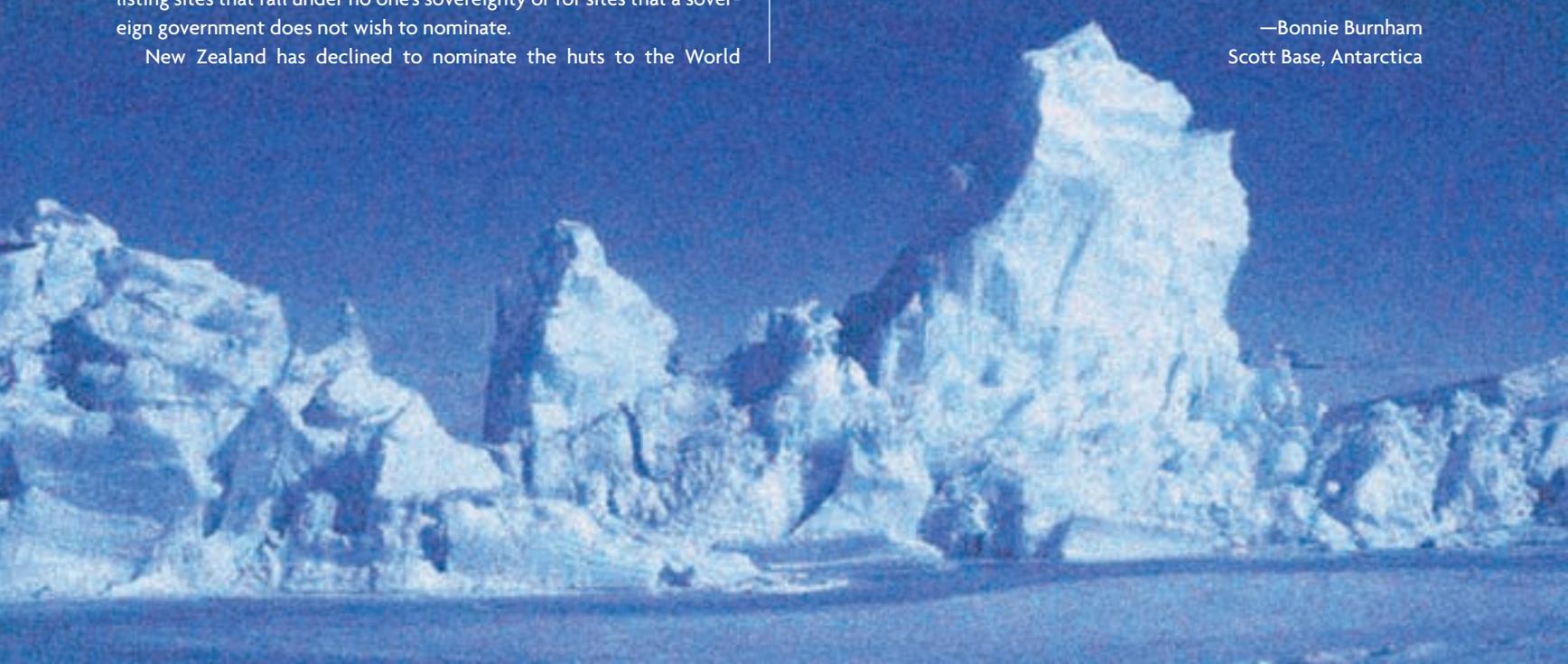
New Zealand has declined to nominate the huts to the World

Heritage list, on the grounds that the gesture could be illegal under the Antarctic Treaty. The huts, indisputably part of a global legacy, fall through a giant loophole in the international framework meant to give the highest level of protection and recognition to just such sites. So do the continent’s majestic landscape features, which some conservationists fear could fall prey to mineral exploitation.

With AHT’s publication of conservation plans for the huts last year, debate has begun to swirl among Antarctic buffs about how best to protect and present these shrines to human endeavour. The plans, calling for substantial restoration of the interiors to reflect specific periods of exploration, rather than the accidental arrangements that we find today, would be justified by an expected increase in tourism to the continent. Visitors to the huts deserve the opportunity to experience, in all its authenticity, the unique environment that has been “congealed” from destruction by the continent’s unique atmosphere. But the parties to the Antarctic Treaty are opposed in principle to Antarctic tourism, which is presently unregulated and informal. Conservation organizations working there, increasingly in need of tourism strategies for sensitive sites like the huts, must follow the treaty’s policies in this area, even if tourism is clearly inevitable.

After 30 years as the world’s highest level of heritage protection, the World Heritage Convention could be the regulator of situations like this. The time may have come for its drafters to sharpen their pencils and rework its language on the question of how sites may be selected for the list. In recent years we have seen great examples of the world’s cultural legacy damaged in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, which had no access to the system of World Heritage protection because the owner-state had no capacity or desire to participate. Should the future of human legacy be in the hands of partisan local governments, or should a mechanism exist that overrides conscious or unwitting neglect of internationally significant sites? This is a question that bears on the future of much of the world’s heritage. Antarctica, which has been so successfully shielded from territorial claims and disputes, could be the test case. ■

—Bonnie Burnham
Scott Base, Antarctica



which the expedition's carpenter, Chippy McNeish, had transformed into a sailboat. Their destination: South Georgia Island, a tiny speck of land 1,300 kilometers across the stormy seas of the Southern Ocean. After 17 days in heavy seas and near-zero visibility, the party reached South Georgia, from which Shackleton was able to mount an expedition to rescue those left behind on Elephant Island. The tale of the journey—the subject of the recent book, *Endurance*, by Caroline Alexander, and the movies that it spawned—has often been called “the greatest story of survival ever told.” Far less-known, however, is the story of the men Shackleton dispatched to the far side of the continent to lay supply depots in preparation for the explorer's arrival at the end of what was to be a successful journey. Over the course of two summers, the party was stranded on Ross Island when their ship, the *Aurora*, blew out to sea in a blizzard, unable to return. Despite being low on supplies themselves the men continued laying supply caches, not realizing Shackleton would never arrive overland. Their tale has been called “the greatest story of survival never told.”

Although the Ross Sea party never built a hut, they used Scott's huts at Cape Evans and Hut Point for two years, leaving many artifacts in those huts as evidence of their passing. When Shackleton finally rescued them in January 1917, the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration drew to a close as world attention turned to the war raging in Europe. They would not see another visitor for 40 years.

In 1947, during the American-led “Operation High Jump,” the crew of the icebreaker *USS Burton Island* visited the huts, finding them largely filled with drifting snow. In the 1950s, the huts were again visited by members of the American campaign “Operation Deep Freeze.” During the British Trans Antarctic Expedition of 1957–1958, the crew of the New Zealand support ship *Endeavour* and expedition personnel removed ice and carried out essential maintenance on the huts at Cape Royds, Cape Evans, and Hut Point.

Following the establishment of the Antarctic Treaty in 1961, the government of New Zealand embarked on a program to care for the huts as part of their research efforts, documenting their condition and cataloguing the artifacts they contained.

In 1979, an action committee was brought together to develop a plan for the long-term preservation of the huts and, in 1987, a charitable trust was established to carry it out. The Antarctic Heritage Trust is based in Christchurch, a city used as a gateway to Antarctica not only by explorers of the past, but by today's American, Italian, and New Zealand Antarctic programs. The trust's vision is to “inspire the future by conserving the legacy of discovery, adventure, and endurance.”

Despite its small budget, the trust has undertaken an ambitious program of maintenance and conservation, bringing international experts in to work in one of the most challenging environments on Earth. Compounding the natural

**ABANDONED CRATES, THEIR
CONTENTS SCATTERED
ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE,
AND KENNELS AND STABLES
SURROUND SHACKLETON'S
HUT AT CAPE ROYDS.**





PORTRAITS OF QUEEN ALEXANDRA AND KING EDWARD VII GRACE THE WALL OF SHACKLETON'S HUT AT CAPE ROYDS, WHICH HE USED DURING THE BRITISH ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION OF 1907-1909.

decay of the buildings has been destruction wrought by humans. All of the huts have suffered the predations of souvenir hunters. As Sir Edmund Hillary, patron of the Antarctic Heritage Trust, has noted: "These historic huts are the relics of some of the greatest adventures and expeditions of the twentieth century, and we owe it to future generations to ensure they are preserved."

On the advice of the trust, limits have been placed on the number of visitors the huts can receive, and strict protocols have been established for visitation. At present, visitors from the nearby American and New Zealand bases outnumber the relatively few tourists that venture south to the Ross Sea on cruise ships each summer; the vast majority of tourists visiting Antarctica go to the far more accessible Antarctic Peninsula on the other side of the continent.

But limiting visitors alone is not enough. "The huts are beginning to deteriorate rapidly," says Antarctic historian and consultant to the Antarctic Heritage Trust, David Harrowfield, adding that, "humidity in the buildings is attacking the textiles, metal, and paper, and unless something is done soon, the buildings will be lost forever."

In response the trust has launched a major global campaign to raise money to conserve and restore all four huts, ensuring their survival in perpetuity. Based on a comprehensive conservation assessment, the trust's first priority is to address Shackleton's hut at Cape Royds.

The challenge facing the trust is how to slow the processes of decay and conserve the site while retaining its historical integrity. Drawing on the expertise of historians, conservators, architects, and project managers, all with extensive Antarctic experience, the trust developed the Cape Royds Conservation Plan, released several months ago, which calls for the treatment of some 90 percent of the more than 2000 artifacts in and around the hut. The exterior cladding of the building will be repaired in keeping with the original style, and fire protection work will be carried out.

Over time, the trust envisions the development of online multimedia programs and materials so that a wider global audience will be able to learn about and experience the magic of the huts, yet with zero impact on the site. To carry out the work, however, poses a number of financial and logistical problems. The cost of comprehensively restoring and conserving the hut at Cape Royds has been put at US\$4 million. To complicate matters, the trust has limited opportunities for funders to witness the work firsthand. The governments of New Zealand and the United Kingdom, as well as the United States-based Getty Trust, have all contributed to the project but more funding is urgently required. For many, the cost of preserving the hut may seem considerable, yet the price of doing nothing will be far greater. As Her Royal Highness Princess Anne, who personally launched the Cape Royds Heritage Restoration Project in Antarctica, has noted, "These huts are the legacy of the extraordinary stories of triumph and tragedy, and must be preserved for future generations. Without the support of the international community, they will be lost forever." For more information visit www.heritage-antarctica.org ■

