

Appendix A: Scott's reputed biases

Introduction

During the *Polar Record* peer review of "Captain Scott rewrote his story: January – June 1911", a suggestion was made, "there is clearly something to be said about the similarities in the way Scott approached dogs on his first and second expeditions, even if there are also differences ...". This is an oft-mentioned topic that falls outside the scope of that article (which is limited to Scott rewriting original journals for part of his second expedition).

Aspects of the broader topic are addressed in my article "Captain Scott changed his mind: the dogs shall not go to the South Pole" (Alp, 2021). Relevant sections from that article are reproduced below, as supplementary material.

Since publishing that article, I have become aware of an insightful passage in Carl Murray's thesis, reproduced at the end of this Appendix.

Scott's attitude towards working dogs and animal cruelty (pp. 10 – 11)

Scott has been criticised for having a *British attitude* towards establishing and maintaining authority over working dogs. For example, David Thomson criticised Scott for not using the "Norwegian manner" (Thomson, 1977, pp. 223-224), as though there was no other effective method for sledge dog management. Roland Huntford raised the criticism to a personal level, "Scott had an uneasy emotional attitude towards animals, his reaction toward animal suffering was mawkishly sentimental" (Huntford, 2002, p. 313). He also claimed Scott had an irrational bias against dogs, "Scott's plans - insofar as they existed - were absurd. His irrational mistrust of dogs, his reliance instead on horses ..." (p. 262) and "Although Scott nursed an irrational, indeed a paranoiac dislike and mistrust of dogs ..." (p. 408). Such characterisations altered public perceptions of Scott in the late 1970's. This section investigates whether

Scott's change of mind was driven by "irrational bias against dogs".

Scott recorded his opinions about managing sledge dogs in *The Voyage of the Discovery*:

Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which dogs may be used – they may be taken with the idea of bringing them all back safe and sound, or they may be treated as pawns in the game, from which the best value is to be got regardless of their lives (Scott, 2009, p. 315).

He went on to say he was comfortable with the first approach but not the second, openly admitting he found aspects of dog management during the *Discovery* expedition (under-feeding, over-working, shouting, beating and killing the spent animals like pawns) to be repugnant and distasteful. He therefore changed the approach for the BAE.

Scott hired Meares to manage dog transport in the BAE. Meares had experience of dog driving in Siberia, where dogs were an important family asset, to be carefully protected to remain fit for work as long as possible. Scott thereby hired a man, with sub-Arctic dog driving experience, to match his personal sensitivities towards dogs. Siberian dog handling practises were well established and could be considered mature (Alp, 2020, "Dogs on the Depot Journey: early 1911"). Siberian methods were not the same as the "Norwegian manner" advocated by Thomson and others. One idly wonders whether such writers actually understood the differences.

Meares was expected to minimise cruelty in dog management, and as a military man, to be hardened to animal distress, suffering and death, sparing Scott from being personally involved. Scott thereby implemented a coping strategy where his personal sensitivities were shielded. He planned to share the driving of Meares' team on the First Depot Journey. Unlike BAE ponies, there was no plan to kill the dogs at the end of their Southern Journey, because they were needed for subsequent journeys that season.

The BAE practise of chaining dogs amongst cargo on the cluttered open deck of the *Terra Nova*, as they crossed the stormy Southern Ocean, can be seen as harsh or cruel, even though it was common practice at the time. Seemingly, Scott did not see it as cruelty, although he did express sympathy for the dogs.

The claim Scott was “mawkishly sentimental” may be more a reflection of Huntford’s own 20th Century upbringing than Scott’s 19th Century life, when the culling of worn-out, unwilling and aged animals would have been everyday occurrences, an unavoidable part of life. It may not have been welcome, but it would have been accepted; there was no choice. Scott’s men would have developed a respect and affection for individual animals, but they would not have been treated like household pets.

Scott wrote on 12 January 1911, “Whether the Southern Journey is successful or not, it may be taken as certain that all these ponies and the greater number of dogs, will have gone” (Scott, 1911a, p. 4), showing he accepted the inevitability of many animal deaths.

Before commencing the First Depot Journey, Scott apparently had an open mind about the newly landed dogs, “I withhold my opinion of the dogs” (Scott, 2006, p. 104). From his *Discovery* dog management experiences, he would have recognised the lack of fitness in Meares’ dogs at the time. So did Oates after his first experience:

Went on a journey yesterday to Glacier Tongue with Meares and 9 dogs only 14 miles there and back and we returned both walking, one dog being dragged on the sledge two more not able to pull atal [sic] and the rest dead beat (Oates, 1911a, p. 4).

Scott’s hands-on dog driving experiences “Siberian fashion for the first time” was successful (Scott, 2006, p. 87).

Early in the First Depot Journey Wilson wrote, “Dog driving like this in the orthodox [Siberian] manner is a very different thing to the beastly dog driving we perpetrated in the *Discovery* days. I got to love all my team” (Wilson, 1972, p. 100). Evans wrote, “I never saw anybody less vicious in nature than ‘Mother’ Meares: he never knocked the dogs

about unless it was absolutely necessary” (Evans, 1961, p. 72). Meares was managing the dogs in the manner Scott wanted.

During the First Depot Journey, Scott took a mater-of-fact approach to recording the dogs’ performance, good or bad, as their fitness improved. He regularly recorded his distress about animal suffering (mostly ponies) but unlike Oates’ ponies, Scott never intervened on the dogs’ behalf.

It is suggested Scott’s change of mind was not influenced by concerns about cruelty in dog management because he had a dog handler who took the dogs’ long-term wellbeing to heart.

The nobility of men hauling sledges (p. 11)

A belief in the moral superiority of human muscle power, popular in Victorian times, was advocated by influential figures in the Royal Navy and the RGS, particularly by Scott’s mentor, Markham.

In *The Voyage of the Discovery*, Scott expressed a degree of sympathy for the belief, possibly to placate Markham:

In my mind, no journey ever made with dogs can approach the height of that fine conception which is realised when a party of men go forth to face hardships, dangers, and difficulties with their own unaided efforts, and by days and weeks of hard physical labour succeed in solving some problem of the great unknown. Surely in this case the conquest is more nobly and splendidly won (Scott, 2009, p. 318).

There is still controversy over whether the quotation should be taken as a freestanding expression of Scott’s personal values, or as a fanciful ideal about avoiding the pain and suffering experienced by the *Discovery* dogs, frankly acknowledged in the three preceding pages. In any event, no such sentiment appears in his lectures or journals of the *Terra Nova* expedition.

Scott’s isolated quotation appears twice in *Scott and Amundsen*, presumably to reinforce Huntford’s adverse characterisation of Scott (Huntford, 2002, p. 184, 379). Jones ably makes the point in *The Last*

Great Quest that Huntford's generalisation is "highly misleading" (Jones, 2003, p. 118).

Scott procured three non-human modes of traction (dogs, ponies and motors) for the BAE. He thus showed by his actions that by 1910 he did not believe in the moral superiority of men hauling sledges, in preference to other types of traction. There is no evidence to suggest Scott reduced the dogs' workload in order to increase the amount of manual sledge hauling.

Extract from Carl Murray's thesis

First, however, it is necessary to quote from Scott's *Voyage of Discovery* to confute three old chestnuts of the anti-Scott canon (see, for example, Huntford; Katz and Kirby; Rosove): that Scott did not appreciate what dogs could do; that, as an Englishman, he was prejudiced against using them for transport; and that he chose man-hauling instead because it was nobler and more virile. The following quotation from Scott's book is regularly given to justify these views:

In my mind, no journey ever made with dogs can approach the height of that fine conception which is realised when a party of men go forth to face hardships, dangers, and difficulties with their own unaided efforts and by days and weeks of hard physical labour succeed in solving some problem of the great unknown. Surely, in this case the conquest is more nobly and splendidly won.

Certainly, these lines appear to offer good evidence for the last of the three claims. They are not, however, from his Antarctic journal: Scott wrote them back in England, and while preparing his book he was lunching daily at the house of his patron, Markham, who was known to advocate this view. In part, it became Scott's own attitude too, in reaction to his experience during *Discovery's* southern journey, when the men had to thrash sick or exhausted dogs to get them to move, something Wilson had described as "soul sickening" But, as is often the case, Scott's perspective was far more complex than a single quotation suggests—especially one which excludes essential context. from relying on them to the degree that Amundsen did. All of this was written long before the *Terra*

Nova expedition and at a time when there was no other Antarctic explorer Scott needed to compare himself with in this regard ...:

The excerpt is from a disquisition on dogs as a means of polar transport that runs for more than seven pages (all written after *Discovery's* return), and it provides a good example of how misleading quotation can be. I will give a precis of what preceded the fragment usually cited in order to show that Scott very clearly understood the advantages of dog travel, and that it was not 'prejudice' that later prevented him ...

(Murray, 2006, pp. 168-169):

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