

The Northern Explorer

Roald Amundsen



Roald Engelbregt Gravning Amundsen was born July 16, 1872 in Borge, Norway, the youngest of four brothers. He grew up in Oslo and at a young age was fascinated by the outdoors and tales of arctic exploration. He trained himself for a life of exploration by taking extended hiking and ski trips in Norway's mountains and by learning seamanship and navigation. At 25 years old, he signed on as first mate for the *Belgica's* expedition, which became the first to winter in the South Polar Region.

Amundsen was the first to sail the Northwest Passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the first to reach the South Pole, and the first to reach the North Pole.

In 1900, Amundsen obtained his ship's captain license and spent time learning about the theory and measurement of the earth's magnetism. He was able to explain his expedition, as an investigator of whether the earth is north magnetic pole.

In 1903, Roald first sailing expedition was with the *Gjoa*, during this time he navigated the Northwest Passage. Many explorers who attempted to navigate the Northwest Passage, Had used Amundsen used a small ship that helped him maneuver the shallow passages through the Canada just north of the Canadian mainland. His crew consisted of just six men beside himself.

In the year of 1903 the Pacific was free of Ice. On September 12 of 1903 Amundsen stopped near the shore of King William Island to perform the magnetic experiments for his scientific work that he had promise for his sponsors.

Unlike other explorers Amundsen was very aware and sensitive to the Inuit way of life. During the time that he was at King William Island he learned the skill of dog sledding, (dog sledding enabled Amundsen to reach the south pole before Peary.), building igloos, wearing the reindeer and seal hides. He also adopted the Eskimo diet. From his experience with the Eskimos, he realized that their techniques were much more effective. (This knowledge help him win the race to the south pole.)

Amundsen next objective was to reach the North Pole. But once the news of Robert E. Peary reaching the pole, he changed his mind and headed for the south pole. He kept this plan a secret until after he left Norway. This decision put Amundsen in competition with Robert Scott, who was also on his way to the South Pole.

Amundsen set up a base camp on Ross Antarctic Ice Shelf 60 miles closer to the South Pole than Scott's camp. Amundsen's superb knowledge of planning, dogsledding, skiing, cold-weather clothing, and snow shelters enabled him easily to beat Scott to the South Pole. Compared to Scott, Amundsen's men suffered minor miseries such as a toothache. Scott's crew on the other hand suffered miserably and died upon their return from the Pole.

Amundsen's third journey started in 1918 with the "*Maud*" that lasted for two years. This vessel was the largest and the best equipped for a ship of its time. His intention was to intentionally become icebound and flow with the ice to the North Pole. Unfortunately, due to the unforeseen events of three accidents, Amundsen had to scuttle the mission. Disappointedly he only reached latitude 76 degrees north.

For his new adventure, he became involved with air travel. In 1924 he met Lincoln Ellsworth, who provided the financial support that Amundsen required for his next venture. On May 21, 1925 Amundsen and Ellsworth with a crew of four successfully took off in two Dornier-Wahl Flying boats north of Spitsbergen only to crash-land 136 miles south of the pole. With one plane badly damaged, they all had to work for two and a half weeks to repair the damaged plane and create a runway that they could take off and return to Spitsbergen.

In 1926 Amundsen and Ellsworth teamed up with Umberto Nobile the Italian airship pioneer to build the "*Norge*", a 348-foot dirigible. This flying marvel left Spitsbergen on May 19, 1926. With a crew of sixteen, they had a successful flight and reached the North Pole on May 12, 1926 before landing in Teller, Alaska 72 hours later. They were the first men to have flown from Europe to America. The *Norge* crew reached the North Pole first. This would grant Amundsen the three greatest prizes in polar exploration: the Northwest Passage, the South Pole, and the North Pole. Amundsen was the first person to travel to both Poles.

NOTE: In August 2006, the Norwegian Council came to Nome to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the arrival of Roald Amundsen to Nome in 1906.