Biography of Bruce, William Speirs

Bruce, William Speirs (1867-1921)

Born in London to Scottish parents in 1867. He was educated at Norfolk County School in England and enrolled as a medical student at the University of Edinburgh, where he was supervised by renowned Scottish physicists, chemists and oceanographers. In 1892, he was recommended for the post of surgeon and naturalist on board the *Balaena* during the British Whaling Exploration (Dundee), 1892 - 1893. The expedition was organized to investigate the commercial possibilities of whaling in the Antarctic, although no right whales were successfully caught. The expedition did, however, give him an ambition to pursue further polar studies.

Between 1895 and 1896, Bruce worked at the meteorological observatory on Ben Nevis. In 1897 he joined the Jackson-Harmsworth Arctic Expedition, 1894 - 1897 (leader Frederick Jackson) to Franz Josef Land as naturalist. After the expedition, he continued his work at the Ben Nevis station, later joining private expeditions to Novaya Zemlya and Svalbard.

In 1901 he married Jessie Mackenzie, together they had a son and a daughter.

Despite considerable financial problems, he organized and led the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, 1902 - 1904. The expedition conducted the first oceanographic exploration of the Weddell Sea and discovered Coats Land. Bruce also surveyed Laurie Island in the South Orkney Islands, where a meteorological station was established in 1903. The station has provided the longest continuous record of observations in the Antarctic region, its operation being entrusted to Argentina in 1904.

On his return he became director of the Scottish Oceanographical Laboratory, a post that enabled him to complete and...
publish the reports of the expedition. Between 1906 and 1919, Bruce returned to Svalbard on a variety of scientific projects, yet despite many successes in the region, he was unable to raise funds for another Antarctic expedition. He received many scientific awards for his polar research, including the gold medal of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and the patron's medal of the Royal Geographical Society, however, he never received the Polar Medal. Due to lack of financial support the Scottish Oceanographical Laboratory closed in 1919 after which Bruce's health started to deteriorate.

He died in Edinburgh on 28 October 1921 aged 54.

Published Works


Further Information

