

# Extreme Conditions

## Source A: Extract from Captain Scott's diary

Saturday, March 25th, 1911 We have had two days of surprisingly warm weather, the sky overcast, snow falling, wind only in light airs. Last night the sky was clearing, with a southerly wind, and this morning the sea was open all about us. It is disappointing to find the ice so reluctant to hold; at the same time one supposes that the cooling of the water is proceeding and therefore that each day makes it easier for the ice to form – the sun seems to have lost all power, but I imagine its rays still tend to warm the surface water about the noon hours. It is only a week now to the date which I thought would see us all at Cape Evans.

The warmth of the air has produced a comparatively uncomfortable state of affairs in the hut. The ice on the inner roof is melting fast, dripping on the floor and streaming down the sides. The increasing cold is checking the evil even as I write. Comfort could only be ensured in the hut either by making a clean sweep of all the ceiling ice or by keeping the interior at a critical temperature little above freezing-point.

Sunday, March 17th, 1912 Lost track of dates, but think the last correct. Tragedy all along the line. At lunch, the day before yesterday, poor Titus Oates said he couldn't go on; he proposed we should leave him in his sleeping-bag. That we could not do, and induced him to come on, on the afternoon march. In spite of its awful nature for him he struggled on and we made a few miles. At night he was worse and we knew the end had come.

Should this be found I want these facts recorded. Oates' last thoughts were of his Mother, but immediately before he took pride in thinking that his regiment would be pleased with the bold way in which he met his death. We can testify to his bravery. He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint, and to the very last was able and willing to discuss outside subjects. He did not – would not – give up hope to the very end. He was a brave soul. This was the end. He slept through the night before last, hoping not to wake; but he woke in the morning – yesterday. It was blowing a blizzard. He said, 'I am just going outside and may be some time.' He went out into the blizzard and we have not seen him since.

I take this opportunity of saying that we have stuck to our sick companions to the last. In case of Edgar Evans, when absolutely out of food and he lay insensible, the safety of the remainder seemed to demand his abandonment, but providence mercifully removed him at this critical moment. He died a natural death, and we did not leave him till two hours after his death. We knew that poor Oates was walking to his death, but though we tried to dissuade him, we knew it was the act of a brave man and an English gentleman. We all hope to meet the end with a similar spirit, and assuredly the end is not far.

I can only write at lunch and then only occasionally. The cold is intense, -40° at midday. My companions are unendingly cheerful, but we are all on the verge of serious frostbites, and though we constantly talk of fetching through I don't think anyone of us believes it in his heart.

R. SCOTT.

## Source B: I fell through Arctic ice by Gary Rolfe

I have travelled 11,000 Arctic miles with dogs, summer and winter. They've been my life. There are fewer than 300 purebred Canadian Eskimo dogs left in the world and I had 15 of them. I sank all my love and money into those dogs, proud to keep the breed's working talents alive. I learnt from the best, guys who in the 1980s had crossed Antarctica and made it to the North Pole with dogs, perfectionists who knew all there was to know. I watched, listened, kept my mouth shut, and one day decided to go it alone. It felt a natural progression.

Alone, it's always dangerous. Something was bound to go wrong one day, and on Sunday March 5 last year it did. Moving over Amundsen Gulf in the Northwest Passage, sea ice gave way. Everything was sinking: my dogs, my sled and me. We kicked for our lives. Powerful Arctic Ocean currents dragged vast sheets of sea ice. Underwater, I couldn't find the hole I had fallen through and had to make one, punching, then breathing again as ice and sea water clashed against my face.

Polar bears eat people, and swim to kill. We'd crossed bear tracks an hour before going through the ice. I remember thinking, did the bastard follow us? Was he under us now? What will it feel like when he bites? The floe edge was a mile away, this a busy hunting area where bears bludgeon seals twice my size. Frantic, I ripped off my mittens. Trying to save my dogs, I was prepared to lose my hands to savage cold. It wasn't enough. Soon drowning and the cold had killed all but one of them.

Out of the water I stripped off sodden, icing up clothing. The cold was brutal. My limbs and head shook uncontrollably. I stopped shivering, indicating I was severely hypothermic. I was slowly dying. Barely conscious, I pulled on my down suit with fingers that knocked like wood. My blood was freezing. Human consciousness is lost when the body temperature plummets below 30C. I was heading for oblivion.

My satellite phone failed. I always have a phone backed up with a ground to air VHF transceiver, but it made no difference – I knew no plane was flying over. I flipped my location beacon. This is a last resort. To flip it means I'm in a life-threatening situation and want out. In the end three polar bear hunters came out on snowmobiles. What they saw frightened them.

I had fourth-degree frostbite, the worst form. My fingers were covered in deathly black blisters, my hands freezing to the bone. The pain when it thaws is colossal, at the top of the human tolerance scale, like a huge invisible parasite with a million fangs. The agony was suffocating; I writhed with it, wild for relief.

My fingers were debrided, scalpels cutting dead meat off thumbs and fingers. It hurt. Fingernails dropped off and smelt funny, and tendons stiffened. Physiotherapy was agony, but I wanted my hands back so badly and to endure meant to get better. My fingers looked a bloody mess, distorted and gnarled. They were always disturbingly cold. I was told the longer we waited, the better: even dead-looking fingers can recover.

I left hospital with 27 stitches and a metal plate on one stub-ended finger. Surgeons described my recovery as "inexplicable" – I had been expected to lose both hands.

1. Read again Source A. Choose 4 statements below which are true. (4 marks)

The weather has been warmer than he expected.

Scott is confident that he will survive.

There have been no tragedies up to this point.

Scott has given up hope.

Scott doesn't care about the loss of his colleagues.

Scott is happy that it is getting colder.

Scott is travelling alone.

Scott wants Oates to be remembered heroically.

(4 marks)

2. You need to refer to Source A and Source B for this question.

Use details from both Sources. Write a summary of the similarities between both of their experiences.

(8 marks)

3. You now need to refer only to Source B, the description by Gary Rolfe.

How does Rolfe use language to convey his feelings about his experiences?

(12 marks)

4. For this question, you need to refer to the whole of Source A, together with Source B.

Compare how the two writers convey their different experiences and emotions.

In your answer, you could:

- compare their different experiences and emotions
- compare the methods they use to convey their attitudes
- support your ideas with references to both texts.

(16 marks)

5. 'Exploration of extreme environments is a dangerous waste of time, I have no idea why anyone does it.'

Write an article for a broadsheet newspaper in which you explain your point of view on this statement.

(24 marks for content and organisation, 16 marks for technical accuracy)

(40 marks)