

Appendix A. Commentary on: “Could Captain Scott have been saved? Revisiting Scott’s last expedition” – *Polar Record* 49 (248)

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Background

This is a formal letter of commentary, written because of concerns about the adequacy of research and concerns about logical argument techniques employed in Karen May’s article “Could Captain Scott have been saved? Revisiting Scott’s last expedition” (May, 2012). The initial intention was to ‘put the record straight’. The current intention is to minimise the complexity of my research article “Dogs of the British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13” by splitting low-level specialist details away from the main article, with explicit cross-references to this updated version of the commentary.

The initial manuscript was submitted to *Polar Record* in July 2018. It was declined without peer review, given the number of papers, commentaries and reply letters on the topic of the Scott / *Terra Nova* expedition that had recently been published in *Polar Record* (Trevor McIntyre, personal communication, 31 July 2018). The manuscript was therefore posted on ResearchGate as a pre-publication draft in November 2018, doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.15220.40327.

An article by Karen May and George Lewis “‘Strict injunctions that the dogs should not be risked’: A revised hypothesis for this anecdote and others in narratives of Scott’s last expedition” (May & Lewis, 2019), has revised

the main conclusion of May’s 2012 article. It may be noted that my initial concern about May claiming that Naval Surgeon Edward Atkinson misrepresented Captain Robert Falcon Scott, leading to the failure to rescue four members of the Polar Party, has been validated. The 2019 May-Lewis article unreservedly pulls back from that claim, “[W]e would exonerate Atkinson of any wrongdoing” (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 8).

To be clear, the 2019 May-Lewis article does not resolve many of the other issues addressed in this commentary.

Because much of the material in this commentary provides useful details to support my research article “Dogs of the British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13”, it has been included as supplementary material. It is published as an appendix, at the suggestion of the *Polar Record* Editor. His objective is for all material supporting a research article to be formally peer reviewed prior to publication. The ResearchGate version of this commentary has therefore been updated to align with my main article and to take account of the 2019 May-Lewis article.

Introduction

May’s 2012 article builds a case that Scott’s instructions about using dog teams for relief of his Polar Party have been misrepresented by Roland Huntford and subsequent

historians. It also suggests strongly that misjudgements at Scott's base led to the failure of the mission to rescue Scott and his Polar Party.

May covers several subject areas in depth, including the October 1911 instructions from Scott to Cecil Meares, in charge of dog transport, seeking to explain why the instructions were not obeyed for one dog journey. This commentary addresses that portion of May's article.

May identifies a major theme on page 73:

I will argue that the decision Atkinson made at this point led to the failure to rescue the four members of the polar party still alive and struggling north: Scott, Oates, Wilson and Bowers.

On page 83, May claims that Atkinson, acting independently, deliberately altered Scott's orders, with fatal consequences:

The evidence and the timing point to one conclusion: that Atkinson independently decided to alter Scott's orders at the exact moment when [Apsley] Cherry-Garrard was appointed as leader of the dog teams. The original mission of heading south to 'meet the polar party' as far as 300 miles out was now altered to the unloading of supplies at One Ton Depot, only 119 miles out. The task was silently, and fatally, downgraded to fit the abilities of the man chosen for it.

This commentary arises from concerns that May has made inaccurate accusations of blame for alleged mistakes of judgement by Atkinson. In my view, she has been hasty in attributing blame and has not considering carefully enough the ample primary evidence that undermines her claims. In the following sections, this commentary focuses on weaknesses in the case against Atkinson. It does not address the full scope of May's 2012 article.

To retain integrity with primary documents, this commentary uses imperial weights and measures, including nautical (geographic) miles, as used by the BAE men.

Did Cherry-Garrard need advanced navigation skills?

May dwells on the subject of advanced navigation skills (and Cherry-Garrard's lack thereof), erroneously relying on a journal entry by Scott about the main Southern Journey. On page 81, May states:

Scott was well aware of the importance of navigation skills, and wrote on 12 June 1911 that 'every officer who takes part in the Southern Journey' (Scott 2008: 222) should possess some knowledge of navigation, including meridian altitude observations.

May mistakenly takes Scott's statements out of that specific context and applies it to the Escort Journey (also called the 'Third Dog Journey').

It may be noted that Bernard Day and Frederick Hooper successfully retraced the southern route from about 81° 15' (more than 100 miles south of One Ton) back to base, without either man being a skilled navigator. The actions of Day and Hooper rebut May's claim on page 82:

However, south of One Ton, the terrain soon devolves into a featureless white plain where a thorough knowledge of navigation is crucial. Beyond One Ton, Cherry-Garrard could not easily proceed.

It may also be noted that Meares and Demetrie Geroff (hereafter 'Demetrie', his preferred spelling, as shown in Fig. A1) successfully returned from about 83° 35' without either man being an expert navigator. This was achieved during long periods of poor visibility, using dead reckoning navigation methods.



Fig. A1 Demetrie's signature (Canterbury Museum, D Geroff collection, MS509)

Retracing a well-marked route is a much simpler proposition than trail blazing on an unexplored frontier. For the Southern Party's journey southward from One Ton, the target had been 13 miles per day. Every day they built a single cairn about four miles out, a double cairn during their lunch stop, pony walls at end of day and a single cairn in-between, meaning the southern route had markers every three to four miles, sometimes closer. Charles Wright's journal confirms the consistency of route markings across the Ross Ice Shelf ('Barrier'), at least as far as the Southern Barrier Depot at 82° 47' (Wright, 1993, pp. 187-207). Scott did this on purpose so that returning parties could travel safely, using straightforward dead reckoning navigation methods with just a compass, a sledge-meter and route instructions (showing the length and bearing of each leg of the journey), thereby averting the need for a proficient navigator in every party. This applied equally to southbound parties retracing the southern route, led by men like Atkinson and Cherry-Garrard, neither of whom possessed advanced navigation skills. Scott wrote:

We are picking up last year's cairns with great ease, and all show up very distinctly. This is extremely

satisfactory for the homeward march. What with pony walls, camp sites and cairns, our track should be easily followed the whole way (Scott, 2006, p. 319).

Scott apparently had no qualms when instructing Atkinson to lead the Escort Party, in order to meet up with the returning Polar Party. Scott was aware of Atkinson’s capabilities and limitations when instructing him to “proceed as far south as possible, taking into consideration the times of return of the various parties, and in order to hasten the return of the final party” (Atkinson, 2011, p. 665). From a letters to his parents (Atkinson, 1912), it appears that on 11 February 1912, just two days before leaving Cape Evans, Atkinson was clearly intending to travel as far as necessary to meet Scott, as noted by May on page 82.

Atkinson was not a proficient navigator. There is no record of him working as a navigator in the Antarctic. Additionally:

- His biographer Mike Tarver commented, “You are right, in my researches, there was no mention of Atkinson having any knowledge or training in navigation, nor any pretence to be a navigator” (M. Tarver, personal communication, 17 March 2018).
- Trygve Gran wrote, “The doctor [Atkinson] was no navigator” (Gran, 1961, p. 185).

Had Scott required a proficient navigator in the Escort Party, he could have instructed Atkinson to co-opt either Edward Nelson or Wright. Nelson was available and was a knowledgeable navigator (Wright, 1993, p. 300; Gran 1961, p. 185).

On 23 February 1912, as he (re)organised the Escort Journey, Atkinson could have requested Wright or Nelson as his replacement. May does not comment on Nelson’s advanced navigation skills (as an alternative to Wright, who George Simpson wanted to take over his own scientific work at base). Neither does she acknowledge that Atkinson’s navigation skills were undeveloped, like Cherry-Garrard’s.

In the event, Cherry-Garrard and Demetrie successfully retraced the southern route to One Ton, mostly in reasonably clear weather, illustrating the worth of Scott’s route marking methods (Cherry-Garrard, 1912c).

In thick fog on their return journey, with the dogs barely under control, they lost sight of their outward tracks and the line of marker cairns for long periods. They missed two of the four depots along the return route. It may be noted that meridian altitude based navigation (as suggested on pages 81-82) would have been no more successful in thick fog, as it requires clear sight of a celestial body.

However, dead reckoning navigation was still possible. Cherry-Garrard and Demetrie were able to re-establish their position from time to time when the fog cleared sufficiently for them to recognise landmarks or to find their outward tracks. Without detracting from it being a miserable experience for Cherry-Garrard and Demetrie, skills in meridian altitude observations would not have made a material difference to the journey, the misery or the outcome.

The statement by May and Lewis that “From 10 to 16 March 1912, Cherry-Garrard evidently lost his way along the well-marked route”, (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 7) is not accurate. Cherry-Garrard wrote at the Biscuit Depot, after bypassing Corner Camp three miles to their east, “I hope Scott, finding no note, will not think we are lost” (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 437). They arrived back at the *Discovery* hut after seven days, the same duration as their outward journey.

Scott’s instructions to Day, Hooper and Atkinson show he was not fixated upon advanced navigation skills for re-tracing the southern route in either direction. In my view, May is mistaken in taking a stance contrary to Scott on this matter.

This section has shown that May is mistaken in claiming that advanced navigation skills were essential for leading the Escort Party along the well-marked southern route beyond One Ton. The claim that Cherry-Garrard could not lead a party beyond One Ton because he lacked advanced navigation skills is erroneous.

The 2019 May-Lewis article does not mention ‘advanced navigation skills’, leaving open the question of whether the authors still believe that advanced navigation skills were required in order to travel safely south of One Ton.

Was Scott misrepresented by ‘the dogs were not to be risked’?

May’s flawed hypothesis about Atkinson

May’s article dwells on the fifth part of the oral instructions that Atkinson gave Cherry-Garrard before leaving Hut Point on the Escort Journey:

5. That Scott had given particular instructions that the dogs were not to be risked in view of the sledging plans for the next season (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 430).

On pages 82-83, May probes the origin of Scott’s ‘particular instructions’ and finds no verifiable record prior to Atkinson’s briefing of Cherry-Garrard on 23 February 1912. She goes on to claim it was invented at that moment by Atkinson and the following rationale appears on page 83:

Why should Atkinson misrepresent Scott’s instructions [emphasis added] in this way? My hypothesis is that Atkinson wished to protect Cherry-Garrard as far as possible. From Hutt Point, Cherry-Garrard would have been able to reach One Ton safely, but his limited navigational abilities would have led to serious difficulties on the Ice Barrier itself [sic]. He had to be prevented from a quixotic attempt to head out onto the featureless plain in search of the polar party for, without the restriction that ‘the dogs were not to be risked’ Cherry-Garrard certainly would have been tempted to try. [...] Atkinson had to prevent this, and stating that ‘Scott’ had expressly forbidden such a move would have been the easiest way of reining Cherry-Garrard in.

As discussed in the preceding section of this commentary, concerns about navigation abilities when retracing a well-marked route are groundless and, ipso facto, May’s hypothesis fails. She provides no direct evidence of Atkinson misrepresenting Scott on this or any other occasion. May defamed Atkinson by claiming he misrepresented Scott.

The new hypothesis of May and Lewis

The 2019 May-Lewis article back-pedals from May’s 2012 hypothesis about Atkinson’s alleged misrepresentation of Scott (May, 2012, p. 83). It is replaced by a new hypothesis (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 9) wherein Meares is alleged to have invented several ‘stories’ in January 1912: (1) about transporting ‘luxury items’ to One Ton (the ‘first obfuscation’ of the 2014 May-Airriess article), (2) about Scott issuing an injunction to ‘protect’ the dogs (‘the dogs are not to be risked in any way’) and (3) about Scott not being dependent on dogs in any way for his safe return.

Meares’ ‘stories’ were allegedly invented so he could avoid any more dog journeys before leaving the Antarctic. Furthermore, Gran is alleged to have created a hypothesis, many years later, about Scott’s last-minute verbal orders to Lieutenant Edward Evans.

The new hypothesis leads to a bold statement, “We now believe that in January 1912, Meares opportunistically exploited his colleagues’ trust to avoid a vital errand and then subsequently disseminated disinformation to Atkinson that Scott no longer required dog teams to meet him south of One Ton” (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 11).

There is no need – in my opinion – for any untested hypothesis in this situation, because relevant evidence can be readily assembled:

- Evidence relevant to story (1) is examined in Supplementary Material, Appendix B, “The ‘first obfuscation’ – ‘a stock of luxuries’”.

- Evidence relevant to story (2) is examined in “An alternative explanation for ‘the dogs were not to be risked’” (immediately below).
- Evidence relevant to story (3) is examined in “Was Scott’s safe return dependent on the Escort Journey?” (below).
- Evidence relevant to Gran’s alleged hypothesis is examined in “Scott’s last-minute verbal orders to Evans” (below).

An alternative explanation for ‘the dogs were not to be risked’

The reader may ask, “Did Scott ever write or say anything about not risking the dogs?” I have found two sources, both originating from a single exchange between Scott and Meares on the Beardmore Glacier.

Gran spent time with Meares at Cape Evans after 25 February 1912, learning dog-handling skills (Gran, 1984, pp. 175-176). This provided an opportunity for Meares to give his first-hand account:

Next day [11 December 1911] [the Southern Party] continued up the glacier. The dogs followed. At lunch break, Dimitri [sic] and Meares were ordered to return to base. Meares raised objections by saying, “Considering what the terrain here looks like today, the dogs have the very best of chances [to succeed]. It is crazy not to take advantage of them”. These were harsh words. However, Cecil Meares was a civilian, and Captain Scott answered, “Today yes, but maybe not tomorrow. I stick with [take the word of] Shackleton, and you know, my dear Meares, what he thinks of Beardmore. The dogs shall meet me, time and place for this I will let be known through the returning support party. As a result, I do not wish to expose the dogs to needless risk” [emphasis added]. Thank you for your help, Meares (Gran, 1961, p. 156).

In other words, Scott did not wish to expose the dogs to crevasse-risk on the Glacier because he wanted them to meet his returning Polar Party later in the season, in the course of the Escort Journey. He reaffirmed his October 1911 instructions to Meares and signalled a possible change of meeting place and date. In this account, Scott does not mention the One Ton Relief Journey, presumably satisfied with the arrangements he had already made for man hauling of the vital ration units to One Ton.

Meares told the same story to Wilfrid Bruce, who supported Scott (his brother-in-law) by writing, “Meares is disappointed that they [the dog teams] were not taken up [the Glacier], but I think dogs amongst those crevasses would have been very risky” (Bruce, 1913, p. 86).

Scott's concern about 'needless risk', emphasised above, is presumably about the risks presented by the enormous crevasses in the lower Glacier region, which had claimed Shackleton's last pony, Socks. As he ascended the Glacier, concerns about crevasse-risk were probably on Scott's mind, fuelled by his own experience of a dog team falling into a Barrier crevasse (smaller than Glacier crevasses) during the Depot Journey.

Atkinson was present at the time of Scott's exchange with Meares and later wrote, "Strict injunctions had been given by Captain Scott that the dogs should not be risked in any way" (Atkinson, 2011, p. 669), presumably based upon what he had overheard on the Glacier. Nothing in Atkinson's account (Atkinson, 2011) appears to contradict Gran's text, which also covers the objections raised by May on pages 82-83. However, neither Gran nor Bruce was present on the Glacier and it would be useful if independent eyewitness verification or refutation could be found. None-the-less, these appear to be the only direct clues about the origin of the phrase 'the dogs were not to be risked'.

In this light, Atkinson's briefing of Cherry-Garrard on 23 February 1912 about not risking the dogs on the Escort Journey may be seen as a safety warning about crevasses on the route to One Ton (particularly near White Island, where Scott's crevasse incident had occurred). This would of course be an accurate relaying of Scott's concerns, not 'misrepresentation' as claimed by May (page 83).

Scott had given Meares a straightforward verbal directive about their current unique situation on the Glacier and there was no need for Scott to commit it to writing as an instruction for others.

Cherry-Garrard wrote detailed journals throughout his time in the Antarctic and nowhere does he mention Atkinson instructing him 'the dogs were not to be risked'. This is the only section of Atkinson's verbal instructions not verified (directly or implicitly) by Cherry-Garrard's own journals. However, several years later he embellishes his story by stating that Scott wanted the dogs to be saved for the next season (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 430). The embellishment makes little sense, as pointed out by May on page 83. The idea of saving the dogs for the following season was not recorded by Atkinson at any time.

In summary:

1. On 11 December 1911, Scott instructed Meares not to expose the dogs to the risk of Glacier crevasses because the dogs would be needed later that season for the Escort Journey,
2. Atkinson overheard that exchange and took it on-board,

3. In early February 1912, Meares told his story to Bruce, who summarised it in his journal (quoted above),
4. Atkinson repeated Scott's warning to Cherry-Garrard (in a different context) on 23 February 1912, while briefing him to lead the Escort Journey,
5. Meares told his story to Gran who included it in his 1961 book *Kampen om Sydpolen* translated above. Gran's quotation shows that Meares understood the importance to Scott of the Escort Journey and that he (Meares) shared that understanding back at base.

The above summary indicates that May and Lewis are mistaken in claiming, "Cecil Meares ... originated the unsubstantiated statement that 'Strict injunctions had been given by Scott that the dogs should not be risked in any way'" (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 1). The statement appears to originate from Scott himself, but only in relation to crevasse-risk, rather than 'the dogs are not to be risked in any way'.

With this alternative explanation, there was no reason for Scott to preserve the dogs for the following season, thereby compromising the working range of the Escort Journey. Cherry-Garrard's embellishment seems to have no basis in fact.

This section has provided an alternative explanation for the expression 'the dogs were not to be risked'. In any event, it is clear that Scott was not misrepresented by Atkinson in the way hypothesised by May.

Did Atkinson 'silently' and 'independently' alter Scott's orders?

May's 2012 article explores possible reasons for the Escort Party's orders being altered to restrain it from proceeding beyond One Ton. As noted above, May claims, "The task was silently, and fatally, downgraded ..." by Atkinson and "...Atkinson independently decided to alter Scott's orders". This section investigates matters relevant to those claims.

May suggests the explanation lies in Atkinson's sympathy for Cherry-Garrard, but I believe the situation to be more complex than that.

The often-overlooked second plan for the Escort Journey

On 20 December 1911, Atkinson had been given charge of dog transport, assisted by Demetrie (Supplementary Material, Appendix B, "Was Meares' departure premature?").

With this re-assignment of responsibilities, Atkinson would have to organise (but not necessarily participate in)

the Escort Journey, which would travel south with the dogs to meet Scott and escort the Polar Party back to base. At that time, there was no certainty about how many dogs would safely return from the Southern Journey, their fitness for further work and how many new dogs might arrive and be fit for work (Simpson, 1912, p. 133). Scott therefore told Atkinson what needed to be achieved, rather than providing detailed instructions. Key points had to be carefully explained and recorded (in a document that has not survived). It seems Atkinson did not retain any non-scientific documents from the Antarctic (M. Tarver, personal communication, 13 September 2019). Letters he wrote have survived, but none he received. Cherry-Garrard's journal mentions written instructions from Scott to Atkinson, "Scott was to have sent back instructions for the Dog Party [Escort Party] with us, but these have it would seem, been forgotten" (Cherry-Garrard, 1912b, 31 January 1912), presumably left behind by Atkinson. Cherry-Garrard's penchant for Edwardian-era 'controlled politeness' makes it difficult to gauge his true feelings, but perhaps he was unsympathetic to Atkinson's situation.

Atkinson's vague statement that Scott wanted the dog teams to "proceed as far south as possible" (Atkinson, 2011, p. 665) may be his high-level summary to colleagues of Scott's more detailed instructions. As recorded by Atkinson, without quotation marks, it is apparently not a verbatim record of Scott's words.

There are three lines of evidence suggesting Scott expected Atkinson to bring the dog teams to Mount Hooper at 80° 32' south, either to meet the returning Polar Party or to bring additional supplies. This represents a significant reduction in mileage from the 82° 00' to 82° 30' range stipulated in Scott's instructions to Meares (Evans, 1961, p. 162).

- Edward Wilson wrote on 29 January 1912, "We are now only 22 miles from our depot and 400 miles about to go before meeting the dogs" (Wilson, 1972, p. 238). A point four hundred miles north of a camp 22 miles south from Three Degree Depot (86° 56') is approximately 80° 40', or 8 miles south of the Mount Hooper depot. Wilson expected to meet the dogs at or near Mount Hooper.
- Hooper recorded in late January or early February 1912, "They hope to find him [Scott] about 200 miles in on the Barrier" (Hooper, 1912a, p. 37). Two hundred miles from Cape Evans along the southern route is about 80° 38', or about 6 miles south of Mount Hooper. This indicates the men at base in February 1912 expected the dog teams to meet Scott at or near Mount Hooper.

- As he returned across the Barrier, Scott mentioned the dogs in four journal entries. The last three entries refer explicitly to the dog teams bringing additional fuel oil to Mount Hooper (7 March, 8 March and 10 March). Scott did not mention the dogs again after 10 March 1912 (Scott, 2006, pp. 407-408).

The revised meeting point is understandable. With the dogs' extended period on the Southern Journey, there was now no prospect of them completing all their tasks at base and then travelling 300 miles back to 82° 30' by 1 March 1912. In addition, 500 pounds of dog food, destined for 80° 30' south (Wilson, 1911, p. 6) had been left with the failed motor sledge(s), reducing the dogs' working range. These facts could explain the meeting point being altered from 82° 30' to 80° 32' (as indicated by Wilson, Hooper and Scott above) and the journey's duration being reduced from six weeks (as per Scott's Table III) to four weeks (as indicated by Dennistoun and Simpson below). There would therefore be a corresponding delay of one week in departure (as indicated by Atkinson, Hooper and Lashly below).

- James Dennistoun noted that the Escort Party was intending to take a month's worth of food for drivers and dogs, which was their hauling limit (Dennistoun, 1912, p. 117, pp. 258-259).
- On 22 February 1912, Simpson expected the dog teams to be away for "probably a month after I had left by the ship [in a few days]" (Simpson, 1912, p. 148).
- On 11 February 1912, Atkinson completed a letter to his parents, saying he would be off in four days to meet Captain Scott (Atkinson, 1912).
- Hooper noted "Two dog teams will leave here [Cape Evans] on Feb 12th to go and get Captain Scott" (Hooper, 1912a, p. 37).
- On 17 February 1912, Lashly was near Corner Camp and noted that he had been hoping to encounter the dog teams heading south (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 415).

Table A8 assembles the evidence for easy assessment. It is apparent that the seven men had similar expectations for the Escort Journey, very different from Scott's October 1911 instructions to Meares (highlighted in the first row). It is suggested that Table A8 provides strong evidence that the plan for the Escort Journey was altered to meet Scott at Mount Hooper with a four-week dog journey.

<i>Escort Journey – evidence of changes</i>				
Source of evidence	Date of source record	Expected departure date	Expected meeting latitude	Expected duration
Scott’s October 1911 instructions (Evans, 1961, p. 162)	20-Oct-1911	First week of Feb-1912	82° 00’ to 82° 30’	6 weeks
Wilson (1972, p. 238)	29-Jan-1912		Approx. 80° 40’ (near Mount Hooper)	-
Hooper (1912a, p. 37)	Late Jan-1912 or early Feb-1912	12-Feb-1912 (Cape Evans)	Approx. 80° 38’ (near Mount Hooper)	-
Atkinson (1912)	11-Feb-1912	15-Feb-1912 (Hut Point)		
Dennistoun (1912, pp. 258-259)	14 or 15 Feb-1912	16-Feb-1912 (Hut Point)		1 month
Lashly (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 415)	17-Feb-1912	15 to 17 Feb (Corner Camp)		
Simpson (1912, p. 148)	22-Feb-1912		-	Probably a month
Scott (2006, pp. 407-408)	7, 8, and 10 Mar-1912		80° 32’ (Mount Hooper)	-

Assembly in the *Discovery* hut

Atkinson and Demetrie travelled to Hut Point on 13 February 1912 to wait a short while before commencing the Escort Journey. They were delayed there for several days by bad weather. While they waited on 19 February 1912, Tom Crean staggered in with news that Evans and Lashly were stranded 30 miles to the south, Evans with a severe case of scurvy. The story of Evans’ rescue by the dog teams is well known and needs no repetition here.

Atkinson, as a doctor, decided Evans’ condition required close medical supervision. He called for reinforcements so he could stay with Evans. By the afternoon of 23 February 1912, there were seven men in the *Discovery* hut – Evans, Atkinson, Lashly, Davies, Keohane, Cherry-Garrard and Wright.

With the outside temperature well below freezing, the men would naturally congregate around the rudimentary blubber stove in the draughty old hut. Conditions were far from ideal, as Francis Davies related:

There was a very primitive stove built of stones with two iron bars across, which burnt seal blubber very well. The blubber, cut into six inch squares, was laid across the bars, then a piece of paper was lit under it and the oil dripping steadily from it kept the fire going.

Bill Lashly [sic] installed himself as cook and served up some tasty dishes, usually seal’s liver [an excellent antiscorbutic for Evans] and onions followed by one of his ‘specials’, a chippattie [sic],

made from self-raising flour and sultanas and cooked in a biscuit tin lid.

The fireplace filled the hut with acrid smoke, and grease from the blubber ran on to the floor mixing with hairs from the reindeer sleeping bags, which was trodden everywhere – everybody and everything was covered in soot (Davies, n.d., p. 222).

None of the seven men in the *Discovery* hut wrote about the mood of the small group but we can surmise they would not have been unduly anxious or distressed. Four parties had already returned from the south, in accordance with Scott’s plan (Motor Party, Dog Party, Atkinson’s Return Party and Evans’ Return Party) albeit with two parties being delayed and one man seriously ill with scurvy, but on the road to recovery. All four parties had returned without serious injury or loss of life. The outlook for the Polar Party was promising (last seen 150 miles from the Pole with ample food and ahead of schedule). The *Terra Nova* had arrived and essential over-wintering provisions had been landed. The season was going more-or-less to plan and it is suggested the men’s collective mood would have been upbeat.

Evans’ state of health

Evans, recovering from scurvy, was in his sleeping bag on the floor near the stove. He was the alpha male of the group and was naturally inclined to participate in all discussions, to the maximum extent possible with his medical condition. Without dismissing Atkinson’s

medical diagnosis, it is necessary to consider Evans' level of consciousness and possible involvement in proceedings.

Upon arrival at Hut Point on 22 February 1912, it appears Evans had been alert and showing an interest in recent events. He later wrote:

[W]e covered the thirty-five miles into Hut Point, where I was glad to see Crean's face once more and hear first-hand about his march (Evans, 1961, p. 226).

Davies wrote:

The hut was very dismal, and in this atmosphere, Lieut Evans lay in his sleeping bag on the floor. Yet in spite of being so ill, he was always cheerful and ready with a joke. I being the only one of the party who had been in touch with the outside world for the past sixteen months, I spent a lot of time telling him all the news (Davies, n.d., p. 223).

Bruce recorded on 28 February 1912, after Evans has been transferred to the ship, "Evans had recovered a good deal, but his legs are still bad" (Bruce, 1913, p. 103).

It appears Evans was *compos mentis* and capable of participating in discussions, at least in a limited way. He was Scott's second-in-command and was therefore responsible for whatever was decided and done.

However, May does not investigate Evans' possible role in the fateful decision to truncate the Escort Journey, treating him as though invisible or unconscious or not worth acknowledging. The 2019 May-Lewis article does not investigate either Atkinson's or Evans' possible role in the fateful decision made in the *Discovery* hut on 23 February 1912.

Scott's last-minute verbal orders to Evans

May's 2012 article challenges the popular 'story' that Scott gave a verbal order to Evans in early January 1912 for the dogs to meet the returning Polar Party between 82° and 83° south, with Evans' scurvy preventing the order being acted upon. She correctly notes that the 'story' first appeared in *Scott and Amundsen* (Huntford, 2002, p. 457, 520) and then goes on to deduce that Huntford had misread Scott's instructions for the Dog Party (Evans, 1961, pp. 160-163). "This unquestionably, has to be the original source for Huntford's story", she wrote, "The story of Scott's last minute change of mind is an error on Huntford's part" (May, 2012, p. 79).

The 2019 May-Lewis article alters that stance. It is now hypothesised that in 1945 (or later) "In Norway, Gran

wrote ... culminating in Gran's hypothesis of 'Scott's last-minute verbal orders to Evans'" (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 9), and that Gran's 'hypothesis' was later adopted uncritically by Huntford and included in his book.

There is no need – in my opinion – for any untested hypothesis by May and Lewis in this situation, because relevant evidence can be readily assembled. Scott's October 1911 instructions to Meares stipulate that the date for commencement of the Escort Journey "must depend on news received from returning units" (Evans, 1961, p. 162). This meant that upon returning to base, both Atkinson and Evans were required to tell the Dog Party leader at that time about Scott's actual progress and Scott's instructions for commencement of the Escort Journey. The alleged 'last-minute verbal orders' sit within this framework.

Atkinson left the Southern Party on 22 December 1911, when they were several days behind schedule (i.e. behind Shackleton's dates). For much of the Glacier journey, the surface had been poorer than expected and Scott's sledging team was still to take-on their maximum load. Success for the Polar Party could not be taken for granted, so Scott sent back 'news' updating the Escort Journey instructions (summarised by Atkinson) to "proceed as far south as possible, taking into consideration the times of return of the various parties" (Atkinson, 2011, p. 665). Scott seems to have played safe with 'as far south as possible' because of uncertainty about his speed and date of return.

Evans left the Polar Party on 4 January 1912, which by then was ahead of Shackleton's dates. He therefore brought 'news' from Scott that the Polar Party was making excellent progress and might well be home early, so the Escort Party should depart as soon as possible. Scott's 'news' was correctly delivered by Evans and understood, as later recorded by several men:

Cherry-Garrard wrote about Scott's reported progress:

The Last Returning Party [Evans' Return Party] came back with the news that Scott must reach the Pole with the greatest ease. This seemed almost a certainty: and yet it was, as we know now, a false impression. [...] No doubt, the general idea then was that Scott was going to have a much easier time than he had expected (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 391).

[I]t was supposed that all previous estimates made for the return of the Polar Party were too late, and that the opportunity to reach One Ton Camp before them had been lost (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 430).

Crean's optimism is noted in his biography:

He was also optimistically on the lookout for Scott's [Polar] party, who he assumed, with five fit men in the harness, would be travelling faster than the slow-moving and weakening trio. He continually looked back over his shoulder in hopeful anticipation of catching a glimpse of an approaching black speck on the distant horizon (Smith, 2000, p. 133).

Gran wrote about Scott's progress, without disclosing his source, presumably Evans:

Every indication was that Scott and his South Pole party were not far away. It would, in the opinion of Lieutenant Evans and his two companions, be unlikely if the dogs, even if they started at once, would reach the One Ton depot before Scott (Gran, 1961, p. 184).

Evans told Dennistoun:

They [the Polar Party] were all fit and had full ration travelling at only 7 miles a day, as a matter of fact they were doing about 12 a day. The weather was improving all the time so was the surface. And it is certain they will get there, and almost certain they will get back safely to Cape Evans (Dennistoun, 1912, pp. 228-229).

It is clear that Evans successfully delivered 'news', as intended by Scott, and that it was correctly understood.

The suggestion that in early January 1912 Scott issued different 'orders' to Evans, for the dogs to travel further south than planned (as far as 83°) makes little sense in this setting, with Scott being ahead of schedule. Despite it appearing in the works of several respected polar writers, I have found no verifiable evidence to support the suggestion. It would be unthinkable for Scott to order a journey that would exceed their (food-determined) limit of four weeks travel, with likely fatal consequences for men and dogs.

Likewise, the suggestion that Evans' scurvy prevented him from passing on Scott's 'news' is not supported by verifiable evidence. "Evans' state of health" (above) shows he was capable of relaying Scott's 'news', and this section has shown that he did indeed deliver it.

The May-Lewis hypothesis that Gran invented the hypothetical idea of Scott's last-minute verbal orders to Evans (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 9) does not alter any of the evidence about Evans' delivery of Scott's 'news', as discussed in this section. It has no bearing on any dog journey and therefore lies outside the scope of this commentary and my main research article.

The next section described how Evans' 'news' was acted upon by the men assembled in the *Discovery* hut.

Decision to truncate the Escort Journey

On 23 February 1912, in the isolated *Discovery* hut, seven men (Evans, Atkinson, Lashly, Davies, Keohane, Cherry-Garrard and Wright) made a rash decision. We have no information about their individual involvement in the decision-making process.

They needed to update Scott's instructions for the Escort Journey in light of the 'news' brought by the two returning parties, apparently deciding that it could be truncated and that the dog teams now had no need to travel beyond One Ton, as Scott would surely beat them to that depot. They decided on 21 days' worth of dog food (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 430), even though the dog teams could have hauled four weeks' worth (Dennistoun, 1912, p. 117). This last-minute truncation was a mistake and was not what Scott had intended.

It is quite possible that in truncating the Escort Journey, the men were doing their best to comply with Scott's instructions by 'taking into consideration the information brought back by returning parties'.

Cherry-Garrard referred to the considerations, calculations and estimations carried out in the *Discovery* hut that day (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, pp. 429-430). He copied the most important of the calculations and the dead reckoning navigation instructions into his sledging journal (see "Cherry-Garrard's written instructions" immediately below). Atkinson referred to considerations of weights and estimated dates (Atkinson, 2011, p. 666). Evidently, at least one member of Evans' Return Party plus Cherry-Garrard and Atkinson were involved in the re-planning process, it was not a matter of Atkinson acting 'independently' and 'silently' as claimed on page 83 by May.

Evans was Scott's second-in-command and was therefore responsible for whatever was decided and done in his presence. Atkinson was in charge of dog transport at the time, and was still responsible for his own return party members, both roles being subordinate to that of second-in-command.

The May-Lewis article does not mention Atkinson's role in altering Scott's instructions by truncating the Escort Journey. Apart from noting that "Atkinson unquestionably took charge at Hut Point during this period" (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 7) they leave open the question about what role they believe he (and Evans) played on 23 February 1912 in the fateful decision for Cherry-Garrard to travel no further than One Ton.

Cherry-Garrard's written instructions

Atkinson (still in charge of his return party members) delegated the Escort Party leader's role to Cherry-Garrard, instructing him to leave all cargo at One Ton, unless Scott was encountered sooner (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 430).

Six pages of instructions and relevant details appear in Cherry-Garrard's journal entry for 24 February 1912 (Cherry-Garrard 1912c):

1. The first page includes the readings from both Demetrie's and Cherry-Garrard's sledge-meters at the start of the journey, for use in dead reckoning navigation along the route.
2. The second page includes a calculation for when the Polar Party was expected to reach One Ton, based upon Evans' Return Party dates and Scott's estimated speed. The calculation shows Scott was expected to reach One Ton on 30 February [sic] [i.e. 1 March 1912]. It then moves on to record navigation data for the first leg of their journey.
3. The next page defines the rest of the route from Hut Point to One Ton, and no farther. The route is defined in three legs, by bearing and length, followed by simplified instructions for magnetic (compass) variance correction (constant 150 degree correction), with an explanatory diagram.
4. The next page has a list of provisions to be taken from Hut Point, plus a list of provisions known to be already stowed at One Ton.
5. The next page itemises dog food to be picked up from Hut Point, Biscuit Depot and Corner Camp. Cherry-Garrard knew, before leaving Hut Point, that there was no dog food at One Ton.
6. The sixth page has a list of news items to be conveyed to the Polar Party.

His narrative in the same journal (Cherry-Garrard, 1912c) shows he and Demetrie had details about all cairns and pony walls along the route to One Ton and that they tried to locate each of them, to confirm the accuracy of their track. The explicit details of cairns and pony walls do not appear in his journal.

The calculations on the second page are based upon the distance from the Pole where Evans' Return Party turned. This information must have come from Evans, the only navigator in his party. Atkinson could not 'independently' know this distance.

The third page illustrates the level of expertise required to define the route, which is set out in precise detail. For example, "Safety Camp to Corner Camp S68E Distance

23m." and "Observation Hill from Corner Camp bears N68W". This level of detail has evidently come from an experienced navigator, meaning either Evans or Wright was involved. It is most unlikely that Atkinson could have produced this information 'independently'.

On page 83, May states:

Furthermore, Atkinson kept these instructions to Cherry-Garrard purely oral, even though a novice would have gained much needed reassurance from explicit orders in writing.

It seems strange for May to emphasise the oral instructions and yet ignore the six pages of written instructions in Cherry-Garrard's journal. Cherry-Garrard had both oral and written instructions but May has apparently ignored the latter.

Was Scott's safe return dependent on the Escort Journey?

This section examines the limited evidence available about Scott's reliance on the Escort Journey.

Scott instructed Meares in October 1911, "[S]tart your third journey to the South ['About the first week of February 1912'], the object being to hasten the return of the third Southern unit and give it a chance to catch the ship [this season]" (Evans, 1961, p. 162). At that time, Scott was apparently not relying on the Escort Journey for his safe return, simply seeking a more rapid return.

In November 1911, Scott took the dogs further south than planned. He was prepared for them not to survive, writing to Simpson "the [dog] teams may be late returning, unfit for further work or non-existent" (Simpson, 1912, p. 133). Scott did not consider, at that time, the dogs to be essential for his safe return.

On 3 January 1912, Scott sent back 'news' via Evans, that his party was ahead of schedule and confident of attaining the Pole (see "Scott's last-minute verbal orders to Evans" above). There was a good chance he would be back ahead of schedule, with a slim chance of getting a press release to the ship before it departed.

None of the men involved in the fateful 23 February 1912 decision to truncate the Escort Journey appreciated, or had any way of knowing, the true state of the Polar Party (see "Decision to truncate the Escort Journey" above).

It was not until 27 February 1912 that Scott recorded any anxiety about meeting up with the dogs, by which time he had already organised Meares' departure (Supplementary material, Appendix B, "Was Meares' departure premature?"), he had no way to send instructions back to

base and Cherry-Garrard was already on his way to One Ton.

It is beyond the scope of this commentary to speculate on possible outcomes if different decisions had been made by expedition members. All that can be said with confidence is that by truncating the Escort Journey and limiting the amount of dog food taken, the time available to search for Scott was reduced from four weeks down to three weeks. We can never know if that extra week would have changed the expedition's outcome.

Conclusions

Nothing in the foregoing suggests Atkinson acted 'independently' and 'silently' to misrepresent Scott, as claimed by May.

The ResearchGate version of this commentary (November 2018) concludes:

May's article is strong in her conclusions about Atkinson's honesty and integrity. The conclusions are however based on hypotheses and assumptions, with quite a lot of speculation and minimal clear evidence from primary records. I find it

unsatisfactory for a writer to be so sure in stating her conclusions with such a paucity of strong evidence. In my opinion, an author needs to exercise considerable caution in making accusations against individuals when there is no opportunity for those accused to respond, or to explain their version of events.

The 2019 May-Lewis article unreservedly pulls back from the allegation that Atkinson misrepresented Scott, "In this new hypothesis, we would exonerate Atkinson of any wrongdoing." (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 8).

One wonders whether May has apologised to Atkinson's descendants for any distress caused by the allegations that Atkinson misrepresented his senior officer and 'silently' altered his senior officer's instructions.

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