

Appendix B. Commentary on: “Could Captain Scott have been saved? Cecil Meares and the ‘second journey’ that failed” – *Polar Record* 51 (258)

Table of Contents

Background	1
Introduction	1
Simpson’s journal mischaracterised	2
The ‘first obfuscation’ – ‘a stock of luxuries’	4
First possible explanation for ‘a stock of luxuries’	4
Second possible explanation for ‘a stock of luxuries’	5
The ‘second obfuscation’ – surplus food at One Ton.....	6
The ‘third obfuscation’ – ‘returning parties to bring orders for dog teams’	8
The claims of Cecil Meares’ culpability.....	9
Was Meares’ departure premature?.....	9
Men and dogs unloaded the <i>Terra Nova</i>	9
Other criticisms and judgements of Meares and his ‘culpability’	11
Was Scott’s safe return dependent on the One Ton Relief Party taking dog food?.....	11
Conclusions	12
References	12

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 and Sarah Airriess’ article “Could Captain Scott have been saved? Cecil Meares and the ‘second journey’ that failed” (May & Airriess, 2014). 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 December 2017 and published in June 2018. May exercised a right of response, which was published along with the commentary (May, 2018).

Supportive feedback and suggestions for further research were received, so the commentary was updated. Since further commentaries related to the article were unlikely to be published in *Polar Record* at the time, my updated commentary was posted on ResearchGate as a pre-publication draft in June 2019, doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.34706.91844.

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) builds on the 2014 May-Airriess article. It draws on the “cumulative research and evolved understanding” developed in several of May’s articles: (May, 2012), (May & Airriess, 2014) and subsequent articles (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 8), without re-evaluating the underlying research and analysis.

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

Because much of the material in this commentary provides useful details to support my main 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 research article and to take account of the 2019 May-Lewis article.

Introduction

This commentary builds upon a previous commentary published in *Polar Record* (Alp, 2018). Prompted by

supportive feedback received and suggestions made for further research, four sections have been added: "Simpson's journal mischaracterised", "The 'first obfuscation' – 'a stock of luxuries'", "Was Scott's safe return dependent on the One Ton Relief Party taking dog food?" and "Conclusions". The section "The claims of Cecil Meares' culpability" has been extensively revised.

The 2014 May-Airriess article builds a case against Cecil Meares (in charge of dog transport) for failing to re-stock One Ton Depot in accordance with Captain Robert Falcon Scott's written instructions.

May and Airriess claim that Meares was guilty of disobedience, neglect of duty and 'obfuscation'. Their case is diminished – in my view – by several significant mistakes that undermine the claims against Meares. This commentary identifies those mistakes and considers whether the strong claims made about Meares are justified.

The article under review is a follow-up to "Could Captain Scott have been saved? Revisiting Scott's last expedition" (May, 2012), which investigated several factors contributing to the dog journey that was intended to escort the returning Polar Party back to base, the 'Escort Journey' (also called the 'Third Dog Journey'), failing to meet up with Scott and his party. It presents additional research related to the 'One Ton Relief Journey' (also called the 'Second Dog Journey') and an opportunity to re-stock One Ton.

On page 260, May and Airriess state their objective:

In this article, we shall examine circumstances leading to the failure to restock One Ton depot and the culpability of Meares.

On page 268, May and Airriess state:

Whatever Meares' personal reasons may have been, what ultimately matters is that there is no objective justification for his deliberately shirking clearly outlined duties on which the lives of other men depended. A clear line of causality links Meares' negligence with the deaths of at least three men, and no amount of retrospective psychology can excuse him from shouldering his portion of the blame.

May and Airriess criticise Meares for a failure to restock One Ton as he had been instructed. They also criticise him for what they call three cases of 'obfuscation' to cover his failure, with 'obfuscation' meaning an action of concealing something or making it more difficult to see or understand.

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

Simpson's journal mischaracterised

May and Airriess apparently wish to elevate the status of George Simpson's journal, at least for the period he was in charge of the Cape Evans base, to something akin to a ship's log or an official base record. On page 266, a claim is made "[D]uring his time in charge Simpson kept a clear written record of Scott's orders and how they had been followed". As noted below, Simpson's account is far from complete and the authors' claim is therefore misleading. They rely upon a rather small and cryptic portion of Simpson's journal and when one reads Simpson's entire journal, the problem with their claim becomes apparent:

- Simpson recorded frankly, "This account of our doings cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called a diary for it is a month since I last wrote anything" (Simpson, 1994, 11 June 1911).
- His entries are intermittent, typically several weeks apart. An 'official' account would have entries for most days.
- He wrote about factual matters that interested him. He wrote very little about people, food, animals, emotions, administration and events at base. At times when he was busy with scientific work, he wrote less frequently and in less detail.
- For example, Simpson did not record the return, on 23 January 1912, of the four-man One Ton Relief Party that hauled vital stores to One Ton (Hooper, 1912a, p. 41). Yet he devoted almost two pages to describing an inverted mirage of the *Terra Nova* observed on 17 January 1912.
- He did not record the absence of Herbert Ponting, Cecil Meares and Demetrie Geroff (hereafter 'Demetrie', his preferred spelling), who all went off to Cape Royds on 7 January 1912 for several days so Ponting could photograph Adelie penguins (Ponting, 1949, p. 250).
- He did not record his own decision not to erect the scientific hut at Butter Point, which was eventually sent back as ballast in the *Terra Nova* (Bruce, 1913, p. 104). He told James Dennistoun there were insufficient scientists left to spare anybody to work at Butter Point (Dennistoun, 1912, pp. 124-125). None of this is recorded in his journal.
- He did not record any follow-up after Meares' 17 January 1912 departure with the dogs was delayed.
- There was no discernible change in his style or frequency of writing when he was put in charge of the Cape Evans base on 1 November 1911. He did not alter his style to write a more formal or complete account of events.

May made an assumption about Simpson's record-keeping responsibilities:

In writing his journals in 1912 Simpson, as head of base, had the task of recording events at base (not least for Scott, who in January 1912 was still expected to return from the South Pole later that year, and read Simpson's account to see what had transpired in his absence) (May, 2018, p. 5).

May does not provide any justification for the assumption that Simpson was obliged to record events at base. More importantly, she does not explain why her assumption is at such variance with what Simpson actually recorded (and failed to record) in his journal.

Simpson's terms-of-employment provide an insight into his true responsibilities. He had been granted leave of absence from a permanent position in the Indian Meteorological Service in order to participate in the British Antarctic Expedition. Like all other expedition members, his contractual engagement was through a document *Agreement and Account of Crew - Yacht* (Board of Trade, 1910). In a legal sense, Simpson signed-on to be a crewmember on a private yacht, in the role of 'physicist', at an annual salary of £250. That document did not bring expedition members under naval protocols, codes of conduct or customs. Simpson's main legal responsibility was to obey Scott's lawful commands, "Officers [and] Crew hereby agree to obey all lawful commands given by him [the Commander] whether on board, in boats, on shore, on the ice or elsewhere ..." (Board of Trade, 1910).

Scott did not issue navy-style 'orders' to his various team leaders, he issued civilian-style 'instructions' and made 'arrangements'. While on the ice, Scott used that terminology consistently throughout his journals.

May and Airriess appear to believe the *Terra Nova* expedition was a naval undertaking, not a private expedition. For example, on page 266, "Furthermore, an officer could have used naval authority to ensure the orders left by Scott were executed in full". They appear to believe Simpson had traditional naval-style responsibilities prescribing how he should manage the Cape Evans base in Scott's absence, apparently in addition to his written instructions from Scott (Evans, 1961, pp. 155-157). Scott's instructions to Simpson do not mention record keeping.

The May-Lewis article takes a similar stance, "Had Scott survived in 1912 to learn all of this, Meares would probably have faced punishment" (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 10). This suggests a belief that the Naval Discipline Act of 1866 applied to crewmembers of the private *Terra Nova* expedition.

Several versions of Simpson's journal exist. The original handwritten version is held by the Scott Polar Research Institute as SPRI MS 704/1-4; BJ. It is now too fragile to copy or scan for off-site and offshore researchers. This commentary relies instead upon a four-volume version that, according to its title pages (Fig. B1), was "microfilmed, printed and photocopied from the original second carbon copy, in the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge 1994". This version does not have an SPRI call number and is cited herein as Simpson (1994).

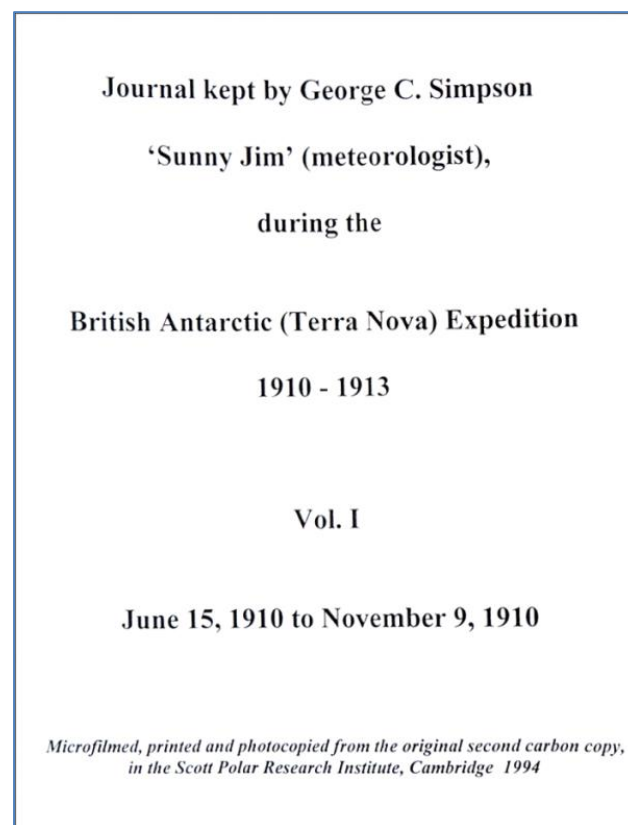


Fig. B1 Title page of Simpson's journal cited in this commentary

On 21 January 1912, Simpson wrote about the period since his previous entry, dated 31 December 1911. His words in that entry relating to Meares and the dogs are reproduced below in full, for later reference.

[O]n January 5th Meares and Demetri [sic] returned with the two dog teams. They reported that all had gone well [...]

We had expected the dogs back on the 15th of Dec. - we were getting very anxious as time went on and they did not come; so we were very happy when they arrived safely in very good form. In spite of their long journey the dogs were very fit; in fact they came from Hut Point here (15 miles) in two hours. On their return, the dogs were rested, but there was more work ahead for them. Meares intended to go out to One Ton Camp again taking a little more food; but

chiefly to take out a stock of luxuries like Irish Stew, Marmalade and Tinned Fruits. Meanwhile there was no change in the ice conditions here. Last year the *Terra Nova* arrived off Cape Evans on Jan 4th. This year at that date the ice extended as far north as we could see from our highest hill. On the 17th of January Meares had his sledges packed with the idea of starting that evening.

During the afternoon Anton [Omelchenko] rushed in to me saying 'the *Terra Nova* is come'. Out I rushed to find Ponting at the top of Vane Hill looking north, through his glasses. I got a pair and was quickly by his side. There was no doubt; there was the ship on the horizon [...]

Simpson continued, writing about the mirage and then about the weather before briefly mentioning Meares again:

Naturally when the ship was seen Meares delayed his departure in the hope of being able to take home news with him (Simpson, 1994, 21 January 1912).

May and Airriess rely upon the above quotations to build a significant part of their case against Meares. They portray Simpson's journal as being a full and reliable account of events at base while he was in charge; a trusted record of Meares' alleged misconduct. I beg to differ, as May and Airriess appear to overlook the shortcomings of Simpson's journal.

This section has established the true nature and incompleteness of Simpson's journal. The next section identifies a further gap in Simpson's account of events and challenges the interpretations and hypotheses made by May and Airriess.

The 'first obfuscation' – 'a stock of luxuries'

On page 266, an allegation is made:

After 17 January [1912], obfuscations of the fact that Meares had neglected Scott's orders begin to appear in the written record, apparently originating from Meares himself. The first possible smokescreen is the idea, recorded in Simpson's journal, that Meares' sledges carried 'luxuries like Irish Stew, Marmalade and Tinned Fruits' ... casting the journey as a favour and non-essential.

This is the alleged 'first obfuscation'. May later confirmed her stance, "I shall briefly outline below why the 'stock of luxuries' statement raises concerns about Meares' conduct. Readers may thus be informed of the strongest evidence against Meares [emphasis added] in the 2014 May-Airriess article ..." (May, 2018, p.5). May and Lewis wrote, "Simpson testifies that on 17 January Meares claimed that his original intention had supposedly been to

transport two sledges containing 'luxuries' from Cape Evans to One Ton depot" (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 5).

First possible explanation for 'a stock of luxuries'

To appreciate the context of the 'first obfuscation', it is helpful to read the full text of Scott's October 1911 instructions to Meares, particularly the instructions for the period following Meares' return from the Southern Journey. Scott's instructions are included in Lieutenant Edward Evans' memoir (Evans, 1961, pp. 160-163). In addition to the phrases selected by May and Airriess, the following should be considered:

After sufficient rest I should like you to transport to Hut Point such emergency stores [emphasis added] as have not yet been sent from Cape Evans. At this time, you should see that the *Discovery* hut is provisioned to support the Southern Party and yourself in the autumn in case the ship does not arrive (Evans, 1961, p. 161).

Scott was clear what he meant by 'emergency stores',

The wretched state of the weather has prevented the transport of emergency stores to Hut Point. These stores are for the returning depots and to provision the *Discovery* hut in case the *Terra Nova* does not arrive (Scott, 2006, p. 301).

Scott's rationale was that if the *Terra Nova* was unable to pick up the returning Polar Party from Hut Point, then the men would be marooned there until the sea re-froze – a period of several weeks. The target stock-levels may be assessed as about eight weeks' worth (from early March until early May) for the Polar Party (expected to be four men at the time), the Dog Party (two men), possibly the Western Geological Party (four men if the ship could not pick them up from Granite Harbour (Evans, 1961, p. 159)), possibly the Last Return Party (four men) and about 22 dogs. With a daily food requirement of about 2 pounds per man and 1 pound per dog (while not working), this comes to well over one ton, a substantial dog team transport job.

We have no record of when, and to what extent, the dog teams restocked the *Discovery* hut in January 1912. Simpson's journal shows no awareness of this matter - another gap in his account of events. The restocking must have occurred to some extent at least, as several men camped there later in the 1911/12 season.

It is remarkable that May and Airriess have apparently overlooked Scott's instructions about 'emergency stores' and focused solely on cargo that was to be transported by the dogs to One Ton.

Scott had appreciated luxury items in the *Discovery* hut as his Depot Party waited there for the sea ice to form in March-April 1911. On 5 April 1911 he wrote, "We are getting towards the end of our luxuries, so that it is quite time we made a move" (Scott, 2006, p. 156). It therefore seems strange for May and Airriess to claim on page 267, "Scott never ordered this ..." in relation to provisioning of luxury items for the *Discovery* hut, to be consumed under the same circumstances in 1912.

The residual cargo to be relayed out to One Ton (after the man-hauler's trip to One Ton and after the *Discovery* hut had been restocked) comprised just two special ('XS') ration units, two gallons of fuel oil and some dog food. It would be remarkable if Simpson could have identified which of the many items being taken by dog teams from Cape Evans to Hut Point were to be subsequently relayed out to One Ton. It seems likely that Simpson would not have been monitoring these items one-by-one, and even if he had seen a bulk quantity of marmalade on a sledge destined for the *Discovery* hut, this does not prove the marmalade was ultimately destined for One Ton. May and Airriess seem to assume that only one load of provisions was to be taken south from Cape Evans, presumably serving both Hut Point and One Ton. They provide no justification for assuming the single load, potentially in excess of a ton (too much for a single journey by both dog teams). Neither do they comment on the common practice of relaying cargo first to the *Discovery* hut and then taking items further south on a later date, which, for example, was employed on the Search Journey (Hooper, 1912b, pp. 3-4).

In my opinion, the stock of luxury items noted by Simpson was most likely destined for the *Discovery* hut, to feed up to 14 men who might have to spend up to eight weeks in the hut. It is unbelievable that a large stock would be sent 132 miles south for four men who would spend no more than a day or two at One Ton. May and Lewis make the same point (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 6). Simpson's cryptic journal entry about 'a stock of luxuries' does not stand up to scrutiny.

The items to be left in the hut would be transported in their clearly labelled bulk packaging, while items for consumption by sledging teams on the Ross Ice Shelf ('Barrier') would be pre-packed into field ration bags for stowage at One Ton. Simpson could not have seen what was inside such bags unless he opened them, but his journal is silent on this matter. The luxury items would presumably be transported to Hut Point last, after the staple items had been replenished to the required level, and after the items destined for One Ton had been relayed out to Hut Point.

May and Airriess are mistaken in stating on pages 266-267 that Simpson recorded the idea that Meares was "casting the journey as a favour and non-essential". That idea appears to originate in the 2014 May-Airriess article. It is not recorded anywhere in Simpson's journal or in the contemporary journal of any other expedition member.

This first possible explanation shows that the alleged 'first obfuscation' is based upon Simpson's incomplete account of events, and that May and Airriess have overlooked a trusted primary source, namely Scott's instructions for re-provisioning the *Discovery* hut. They have provided no direct evidence of the alleged 'obfuscation'. They have provided no evidence that Meares intended to deceive. The claim of a 'first obfuscation' does not stand up to scrutiny.

Second possible explanation for 'a stock of luxuries'

Simpson's journal mentions one dog journey to be undertaken after their return from the Southern Journey. Scott's instructions to Meares clearly identify two dog journeys to be undertaken in the same period (Evans, 1961, pp. 161-162). The obvious question arises, "which of Scott's two journeys did Simpson write about, and why only one?" Neither the 2014 May-Airriess article nor the 2019 May-Lewis article attempts to answer the question directly. They simply assume Simpson was alluding to the One Ton Relief Journey (Scott's 'Second Dog Journey').

It appears from his journal that that Simpson discussed future dog journeys with Meares shortly after his return to Cape Evans on 5 January 1912. We have no record of the conversation, but it is possible that Meares emphasised to Simpson the importance of the Escort Journey, as he did in a later conversation with Tryggve Gran (Supplementary Material, Appendix A, "An alternative explanation for 'the dogs were not to be risked'").

The following paragraphs discuss the characteristics of each journey.

The Escort Journey was to be like no previous BAE dog journey, in that it would have virtually no 'cargo' as such. Almost the full hauling capacity was to be devoted to a payload of food for dogs and drivers, with the sole purpose of maximising the range of the journey, thereby maximising the chance of meeting the returning Polar Party. (The previous BAE dog journeys all had the very different purpose of moving cargo from depot to depot.)

Two men provided insight into the Escort Journey's payload:

On 13 February, Dennistoun outlined the plan for the Escort Journey (with Naval Surgeon Edward Atkinson in

charge at the time), after assisting with their departure from Cape Evans:

They intended to leave Hut Point about Feb 16th with one month's ration for dogs and drivers and a few luxuries for the Pole Party. They are to travel as far south as they can but will have to return whenever ½ their ration is gone even if they have not met Scott. This they should do all right however as he expects to be back at Hut Point by March 15th. If they meet him, they will hurry him in, dogs taking the loads and men travelling [walking or jogging] free (Dennistoun, 1912, pp. 258-259).

Atkinson's wrote about Apsley Cherry-Garrard's cargo for the truncated Escort Journey:

[I]t was decided that the dogs should take 24 [sic] days' food for themselves and 21 days' food for the two men, carrying in addition two weeks' surplus supplies for the Southern Party complete and certain delicacies which they had asked for (Atkinson, 2011, p. 666). [Cherry-Garrard's account swaps the numbers 24 and 21 (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 430).]

Both descriptions of the Escort Journey's payload portray a relatively small amount of 'cargo', including luxury items for the Polar Party. Dennistoun indicated one months' worth of dog food in order to maximise their travelling range, while Cherry-Garrard indicated three weeks' worth because by then the Escort Journey had been truncated (Supplementary Material, Appendix A, "Decision to truncate the Escort Journey"). The common elements in the two descriptions match the journey outlined in Simpson's incomplete account. This suggests that Simpson actually wrote about the Escort Journey (Scott's 'Third Dog Journey') and not the One Ton Relief Journey (Scott's 'Second Dog Journey').

There is of course no equivalent eyewitness description for the dog teams' One Ton Relief Journey, as that journey never eventuated. Prior to despatching the man-hauling party, the dog teams would presumably have been expected to haul a relatively large amount of 'cargo', to be left at One Ton (including ration units, fuel oil and dog food, but not luxuries), plus enough food for dogs and drivers to travel to One Ton and back - maybe 2 weeks' worth. Apart from the destination, this does not fit with the journey outlined by Simpson.

After the man-haulers were despatched, the One Ton Relief Journey was seemingly (silently) deemed complete, with the residual 'cargo' being re-assigned to the Escort Journey (e.g. the 'two weeks' surplus [contingency] supplies' mentioned above by Atkinson).

Simpson seemingly wrote about the Escort Journey. In that case, there would be nothing sinister about a relatively

small amount of cargo containing luxury items and a small quantity of food for the Polar Party. The claim of Meares' 'first obfuscation' evaporates.

This second possible explanation shows that the alleged 'first obfuscation' is based upon a flawed interpretation of Simpson's ambiguous account of events, with May and Airriess making an incorrect assumption about which dog journey Simpson was alluding to. They have provided no direct evidence of the alleged 'obfuscation'. They have provided no evidence that Meares intended to deceive. The claim of a 'first obfuscation' does not stand up to scrutiny.

The 'second obfuscation' – surplus food at One Ton

On page 267, a claim is made that Meares invented the notion of surplus man-food at One Ton, to avoid having to take the dogs south again:

The second obfuscation is recorded in Cherry-Garrard's journal on 28 January 1912, when the latter's party returned to base:

[T]wo miles back we met the 2 dog teams [...] [Meares] was thinking of going out with the other 2 XS rations, but the others [emphasis added] had told him that with what they had left at 1 Ton + the 3 XS rations + one [to be] taken out by Atch [Atkinson], there would be plenty for all parties. I think this is wrong. (Cherry-Garrard 1911 [sic])

Here Meares presents himself as having initially wished to go out again, but having been dissuaded or overruled by 'others' at base. Among the men at Cape Evans were those who had restocked One Ton with 3 ['vital'] XS rations in December 1911 [sic], so they would have known it was understocked. Even if they had told Meares that between their efforts and the final journey 'there would be plenty for all parties', the packed sledges and intended departure on 17 January demonstrate that this opinion had no real power to sway.

There are deep problems with the extent and quality of the authors' research on this matter.

Firstly, May and Airriess are mistaken about the return date of the One Ton Relief Party, which did not return to Cape Evans until 23 January 1912 (Hooper, 1912a, p. 41). These men could not therefore have been at Cape Evans on 17 January 1912 making statements about One Ton being understocked.

May has acknowledged the error (May, 2018, p. 3), but has not explained why the misleading statement was included in her original article.

May also wrote,

However, Alp's objection does not exonerate Meares. [...] Meares inaction on that date therefore cannot be excused by reassurance from the man-haulers on what they 'had left' at One Ton, as on 17 January the man-haulers had not yet returned to base to deliver such reassurance (May, 2018, pp. 3-4).

This is a self-defeating circular argument as May and Airriess are the originators of the idea that the man-haulers brought reassurance (nobody else, including Cherry-Garrard, said that). In my view, May's circular argument does not overcome the flaws in her claim of the 'second obfuscation', investigated in this section.

An alternative explanation of Cherry-Garrard's cryptic journal entry (above) could be as follows:

The only men at Cape Evans on 17 January 1912 (the day of the alleged 'second obfuscation') were Simpson, Ponting, Meares, Anton and Demetrie, of whom only Meares and Demetrie had ever visited One Ton. Simpson, Ponting and Anton could not have known what provisions existed at One Ton in January 1912. Conversely, the men present at the meeting on 28 January 1912 (Atkinson, Wright, Cherry-Garrard, Keohane, Meares and Demetrie) had all visited One Ton and any of them could have provided a well-informed opinion about provisions remaining in the depot. May and Airriess appear to be mistaken about which group Cherry-Garrard is referring to as 'the others', emphasised above, assuming he was referring to the men at Cape Evans on 17 January 1912. May and Airriess provide no justification for that assumption. In my view, 'the others' could refer only to men who would be able to tell Meares about provisions remaining at One Ton on the day when Cherry-Garrard wrote his journal entry, 28 January 1912. This means 'the others' who dissuaded Meares by telling him about existing provision levels at One Ton could only be the members of Atkinson's Return Party.

With this interpretation of Cherry-Garrard's text, the claim of Meares' 'second obfuscation' evaporates.

Secondly, May and Airriess do not establish whether Scott would have faced any shortage of provisions at One Ton. They simply cast doubt on Meares' personal integrity but do not systematically investigate the depot's provision levels. The evidence is readily available:

- Cherry-Garrard's journal for 24 February 1912 itemises the provisions known to be at One Ton prior to his departure (Cherry-Garrard, 1912c). This was equivalent to about 1 summit ration unit and at least 1½ barrier ration units worth of pemmican.
- In his journal entry for 6 March 1912, written at One Ton, Cherry-Garrard wrote, "Made the depot this afternoon – only B[arrier] ration we have for them is

cocoa, chocolate and pem, but they have now double what they can eat". (Cherry-Garrard, 1912c)

- Atkinson wrote about Cherry-Garrard and Demetrie's trip, "On March 10 they depoted their two weeks' supply of provisions for the Southern Party, including several smaller delicacies. One Ton was then supplied with sufficient man provisions for a party of five for over a month." (Atkinson, 2011, p. 669)
- Charles Wright wrote on 11 November 1912 about the provisions the Search Party excavated at One Ton. He itemised a far greater quantity of provisions than the one 'vital' special ration unit plus the contingency special ration unit the Polar Party would have expected. (Wright, 1993, p. 343)

Thirdly, May and Airriess do not take into account the extra provisions left at One Ton by Meares and by others. They could have acknowledged:

- Extra provisions left at One Ton by Meares, from the barrier ration unit left there during the Depot Journey to serve as the Dog Party's return depot, "but to make up, Meares had left quite a lot of extras" (Cherry-Garrard, 1912a, 15 January 1912).
- Extra provisions brought to One Ton by Atkinson's Return Party, which had recorded that it was travelling on short rations to save food specifically in case supplies at One Ton were insufficient (Cherry-Garrard, 2010, p. 397).
- Extra provisions left at One Ton by Atkinson's Return Party, "Have left for 2nd [Supporting] party double as much as we took ... He [Atch] insists on leaving for the second party two or three times as much grub as we take" (Wright, 1993, p. 238).

Fourthly, May and Airriess are incorrect in their use of the term 'understocked'. The intended ('vital') stock level to support the three returning southern parties were identical for all major Barrier depots – Southern Barrier, Middle Barrier, Mount Hooper and One Ton. Each depot required three ration units, together with appropriate quantities of biscuits and fuel oil; adequate for three teams of four men for seven days. The non-vital fourth and fifth special ration units identified in Scott's instructions (Wilson, 1911, Table III), together with biscuits and fuel oil (one unit destined for One Ton and one to be taken further south) were special contingency supplies, to provide a buffer against unforeseen circumstances. These were additional to standard ration units and their absence did not mean One Ton was 'understocked'. May and Airriess are incorrect in stating on page 267 that One Ton was still 'understocked' after the three special XS ration units had been stowed there by the man-hauling party.

On 28 January 1912, Cherry-Garrard wrote the cryptic journal entry quoted at the start of this section. With Atkinson due to take out the two contingency special ration units, a food surplus at One Ton was assured. There would indeed be 'plenty for all'. Minor shortages of man-food were known to exist at depots south of One Ton, which were the concern of the Escort Journey and, as things stood on 28 January 1912, replenishment of those depots was Atkinson's responsibility. The authors' conflation of depletions south of One Ton with the One Ton Relief Journey indicates confusion on their part – the One Ton Relief Party was only ever expected to service One Ton.

This section shows that Meares did not invent the notion of surplus provisions at One Ton. The extent and quality of the authors' research is inadequate. The claim of the 'second obfuscation' does not stand up to scrutiny.

The 2019 May-Lewis article does not mention 'obfuscation' or any suggestion that One Ton was understocked. Neither does it investigate whether One Ton indeed held 'plenty for all'.

The 'third obfuscation' – 'returning parties to bring orders for dog teams'

On page 267, a claim is made that Meares invented the idea of returning parties bringing back essential instructions for the One Ton Relief Party calling it a 'third obfuscation':

Cherry-Garrard's 1922 memoir *The worst journey in the world* holds the third obfuscation: 'I note in my diary [on 31 January 1912] after we had reached the hut, that Scott was to have sent back instructions for the dog team with us, but these have, it would seem, been forgotten.' At the back of his journal for November 1912, in a section titled 'Written on the Barrier after finding the Remains of the Southern Party', Cherry-Garrard elaborates: 'I heard that Meares was told that further instructions as to the dogs would be sent back by the 1st Return Party. These however were not sent'.

It appears that the idea of returning parties bringing order for the dog teams originated with Meares.

Cherry-Garrard's journal for 31 January 1912 does indeed contain the words quoted, but only in the context of the Escort Journey, not the One Ton Relief Journey. The complete entry is reproduced below, to show the context of the authors' selective excerpt:

Atkinson has been busy making up dog weights for his trip to meet the last returning party, and also getting up the navigation from Silas [Wright]. He is left in rather a difficult position. Scott was to have sent back instructions for the dog party with us, but

these have it would seem, been forgotten [emphasis added]. Only a very limited line of dog food can be taken since after Corner Camp there is none on the road. Again it would seem that Scott might reach One Ton a few days after March 1st, and on the other hand it might be about March 15. Had the dogs not got back so late a depot of dog food was to have been run out to One Ton, and this has not been done. But the dogs are to go as far south as possible: it is a strange jumble (Cherry-Garrard, 1912b).

Cherry-Garrard's entry is exclusively about the Escort Journey, written after Atkinson had agreed to lead it, in place of Meares. It starts by describing Atkinson's preparations for going to meet Scott and ends with the imperative to go as far south as possible. There is nothing to indicate that the emphasised text is about the One Ton Relief Journey. May and Airriess are mistaken in citing this sentence as evidence of Meares' culpability for anything to do with the One Ton Relief Journey.

May has acknowledged the error (May, 2018, p. 4), but has not explained why the misleading statement was made in her original article. Some readers may see this as a 'contextomy' - the selective excerpting of words from their original linguistic context in a way that distorts the source's intended meaning, a practice commonly referred to as 'quoting out of context'.

Meares did not invent the idea of returning parties bringing back information to be used in deciding the departure date of the Escort Party. That idea came from Scott himself, as recorded in the texts of two expedition members:

- Scott's written instructions to Meares for the Escort Journey include the phrase: "The date of your departure must depend on news received from returning units ..." (Evans, 1961, p. 162)
- Atkinson's recorded the Escort Journey objective, "to proceed as far south as possible, taking into consideration the times of return of the various parties ..." (Atkinson, 2011, p. 665)

One can understand the need for the leader of the Escort Party to have an idea of how far Scott was ahead or behind schedule, in order to intercept him on the Barrier. However, there was no such imperative for the One Ton Relief Party to intercept another party and there is no contemporaneous record suggesting the One Ton Relief Journey was dependent on news received from returning parties.

This section shows that the claim that Meares invented the idea that returning parties would bring back essential instructions for the One Ton Relief Party is based on a

quote taken out of context and is wrong. The claim of the 'third obfuscation' does not stand up to scrutiny.

The 2019 May-Lewis article does not mention the claim that Meares invented the idea of returning parties bringing back essential instructions for the One Ton Relief Party.

The claims of Cecil Meares' culpability

Was Meares' departure premature?

May and Airriess appear to believe Meares had a "blinkered desire to let nothing interfere with returning home" (May & Airriess, 2014, p. 267). They apparently wish the reader to believe Meares was obliged to stay in the Antarctic for another year and that he left early. On page 267 they state, "A legend of popular history ... has Meares' premature departure [emphasis added] excused by the need to return home in 1912..." and on page 268 "With hindsight, this 'whatever happened' suggests Meares was unconcerned about the consequences of his early departure" [emphasis added].

However, May and Airriess are mistaken. Scott's rules for serving a second winter do sanction Meares' departure in March 1912:

It will not of course be necessary for everyone to stay, and no one will be asked to stay, and those who do so must volunteer. They must not only volunteer to stay; but they will have to stay without any remuneration, for the funds of the Expedition will not provide any salaries for the extra year (Simpson, 1994, 11 June 1911).

Meares had decided before the commencement of the Southern Journey in November 1911 that he would probably want to leave the Antarctic at the end of the season. He had advised Scott, who wrote to Pennell (Master of the *Terra Nova*) that Meares might be travelling back on the ship, "Meares may possibly return; it depends on letters from home" (Evans, 1961, p. 153). Unlike Simpson, who left unexpectedly because of news received from his workplace in India, Meares' departure was neither unexpected nor unplanned.

On 20 December 1911, Scott assigned Atkinson to be in charge of dog transport, as Meares' successor:

Bad news tonight as the first party returns the day after tomorrow consisting of Cherry, Silas, Keohane and myself. I am sorry for the others but expected it for myself. Have been given charge of dogs so it is a bit of compensation (Atkinson, 1911, p. 235).

By this re-assignment of duties, Meares had been relieved of his leadership responsibilities and the necessary arrangements for his transportation back to civilisation had

been made well before the *Terra Nova* was sighted in January 1912.

The claim that Meares deliberately manipulated Simpson in January 1912 by "casting the journey as a favour and non-essential" (May & Airriess, 2014, pp. 266-267) in order to avoid taking the dogs south again appears to be groundless. Meares had no reason to mislead Simpson because Scott had already organised his departure in March 1912. Simpson's approval was not required.

Meares worked on shore until final embarkation in late February 1912 (Gran, 1984, pp. 175-176), which counters the popular story that he was fearful of missing the ship.

The 2019 May-Lewis article takes a similar stance to the 2014 May-Airriess article, stating Meares deceived his colleagues, "cool, fully-conscious deception to ensure a premature departure [emphasis added] from Antarctica" (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 9). In my opinion, they are equally mistaken in claiming Meares' departure was premature.

Men and dogs unloaded the *Terra Nova*

May and Airriess focus tightly on what they believe Meares should have done in January 1912 (i.e. undertaken another southern trip, transporting residual non-vital items to One Ton). They appear to ignore all other Dog Party responsibilities assigned by Scott, including restocking the *Discovery* hut (addressed above in "First possible explanation for 'a stock of luxuries'") and assisting with unloading the ship, as follows.

The *Terra Nova* was sighted on 17 January 1912. At Cape Evans, Simpson had some challenging requirements to evaluate and prioritise:

- Scott had written to Simpson, "I anticipate the ship may have some difficulty in re-provisioning the station. You will of course render all the assistance you can" (Evans, 1961, p. 156).
- Supplies had to be landed and the Cape Evans base re-provisioned in order for men to survive the coming winter.
- The ship was expected to be short-handed (Evans, 1961, p. 162). Only five men were at Cape Evans (Ponting, Anton, Demetrie, Meares and Simpson) plus the two dog teams.
- New dogs and mules, which might not be ready for hard work, were expected on the ship and were to be housed at Cape Evans (Simpson's domain).
- Meares had instructions from Scott for the dogs to take non-vital cargo to One Ton (the 'vital' items were already being man-hauled), prior to the Escort Journey.

In addition to the tasks for the ship at Cape Evans, there were tasks to be performed elsewhere (Evans, 1961, pp. 144 – 155):

- Collect Campbell's Northern Party,
- Collect Griffith Taylor's Western Geological Party,
- Collect a motor tractor from the ice edge (Hooper, 1912a, pp. 39-40),
- Unload and erect a meteorological hut at Butter Point,
- Deliver coal and stores to Hut Point,
- A partial replot of the Victoria Land coast,
- Place a depot at Cape Crozier.

In previous years, the sea ice had gone out from Cape Evans by mid-January. Simpson wrote, "This is the most backward season yet experienced down here" (Simpson, 1994, 21 January 1912). He would perhaps have been concerned about the diminishing time available for unloading the ship and the ship's other tasks.

Simpson's journal does not record his assessment of the challenging requirements noted above. It is suggested that he probably contemplated all five men and both dog teams remaining on standby at base to unload the ship at the first opportunity, at least until the four men of the One Ton Relief Party returned. With, at that stage (17 January 1912), no real concern for the safety of the Polar Party, Simpson's priority was likely to be ensuring the ship's tasks were completed and that it was not endangered. None of the other four men wrote about Simpson's challenges, but their actions show that priority was given to unloading the ship, ahead of taking the residual non-vital cargo to One Ton. Meares remained at base until the ship had been unloaded, by which time the dogs had departed southward for the Escort Journey, driven by Atkinson and Demetrie.

May and Airriess do not appear to have considered Simpson's difficult situation and the possibility that he may have declared, soon after sighting the ship, that all men and dogs must remain on standby at base to unload the ship at the first opportunity. This possibility could have been investigated by May and Airriess before passing judgement on Meares for not immediately going out to One Ton.

Although the *Terra Nova* was sighted on 17 January 1912, it had actually arrived at the entrance to McMurdo Sound on 12 January 1912, but progress had been blocked by pack ice. Pennell described how the *Terra Nova* struggled to get through:

These three weeks were one long succession of being caught in the pack and struggling to get out again. Whenever there appeared to be any change, the ship would steam over towards Granite Harbour or Cape Evans to look ... but every time in reality it was found that only comparatively little had gone out (Evans & Pennell, 2011, p. 723).

Simpson wrote, "[I]t is tantalising to know that the ship is so near yet utterly unapproachable, for we dare not go out towards her for fear of the ice breaking up ..." (Simpson, 1994, 21 January 1912). The *Terra Nova* finally moored against fast-ice near Cape Evans on 3 February 1912. The *Terra Nova* had spent seventeen days thwarted by pack ice, from first sighting until reaching Cape Evans and commencement of unloading.

Wilfrid Bruce, Second Officer on the ship, noted on 3 February 1912, when Simpson and Atkinson first came on-board "Our orders are manifold, & many of them cannot possibly be carried out, under present ice conditions" (Bruce, 1913, p. 96). One can sympathise with Simpson as he pondered which tasks should be downgraded or abandoned.

The delay in commencement of unloading had a flow-on effect for commencement of the next dog journey, because the dogs and their drivers were required to assist with unloading. They would not now be free to leave base until mid-February 1912, by which time there would be no time left for another southern journey prior to the Escort Journey.

All available men and dogs were deployed on landing stores across the sea ice. Fig. B2 shows Atkinson landing stores with a dog team. Note the few dogs and uncovered cargo, characteristic of short transport journeys.



Fig. B2 Atkinson and dog team transporting cargo from ship to base. H. Ponting / Alamy Stock Photo / 2ACXBKT

The 2019 May-Lewis article takes a similar stance to the 2014 May-Airriess article in wanting nothing to get in the way of Meares taking dog food out to One Ton, but with a surprising twist – a new concept of 'inessential duty'.

They wrote, "Scott had ordered Meares not to 'tire the dogs' with inessential duties ..." in the context of unloading the ship (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 6). They provide no insight into how unloading the ship can be seen as 'inessential'. Surely all the men present on the ice, had they been asked, would have seen re-provisioning of the Cape Evans base, in order to survive the coming winter, as being essential.

Other criticisms and judgements of Meares and his 'culpability'

The case against Meares for disobedience and neglect of duty relies upon Simpson's incomplete journal entry of 21 January 1912 and Cherry-Garrard's cryptic journal entry of 28 January 1912. As can be seen in "Simpson's journal mischaracterised" above, Simpson made no claim of disobedience or neglect of duty by Meares – if anything, his journal indicates goodwill and human understanding between the two men.

May and Airriess build upon Simpson's incomplete text to create a deeper and more sinister interpretation.

On page 264, "A wish to wait indefinitely for news ..." is attributed to Meares. The following sentence introduces the concept of disobedience, "Due to Meares' refusal to leave, the depot remained unstocked". There is however, no suggestion in Simpson's journal that Meares ever refused to act on any direct instruction.

Then on page 266, the theme of disobedience is forcefully repeated, "Meares abandoned the crucial second journey", and "fobbed off with Meares' prevarications", and "Meares refusal to leave for One Ton", and so on, over subsequent pages. There is however, no indication in Simpson's journal that any of these claims have a basis in fact.

Was Scott's safe return dependent on the One Ton Relief Party taking dog food?

May and Airriess state on page 268:

[T]here is no objective justification for his [Meares] deliberately shirking clearly outlined duties [the One Ton Relief Journey] on which the lives of others depended. A clear line of causality links Meares' negligence with the deaths of at least three men ...

This strongly suggests that both Scott and Meares realised, when Scott was distributing his instructions in October 1911, that the lives of the Polar Party would ultimately depend upon successful completion of the One Ton Relief Journey (all cargo items), as well as the Escort Journey. This is quite different to Scott's written instruction to Meares at the time, "[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, 1994, 31 December 1911). Scott did not consider, at that time, the dogs essential for his safe return.

It was not until 27 February 1912 that Scott recorded any anxiety about meeting the dogs, by which time he had already organised Meares' departure (see "Was Meares' departure premature?" above), he had no way to send instructions back to base and Cherry-Garrard was already on his way to One Ton.

It is misleading for May and Airriess to suggest on page 268 that Meares knew the Polar Party would perish if the Escort Party failed to meet them. Some readers may recognise the statement 'on which the lives of others depended' as an example of 'hindsight bias' - the inclination to see events that have already occurred as being more prominent or more predictable than they were before they took place.

It is misleading for May to claim that the Escort Party could not proceed beyond One Ton (to Mount Hooper) unless the One Ton Relief Party had taken dog food to One Ton:

The dog-teams could only have travelled as far as Mount Hooper in March 1912 had One Ton depot been previously stocked with dog food by Meares on the 'second journey' in January 1912 (May, 2018, p. 7).

There were in fact several practical, non-exclusive sources of dog food available for travel beyond One Ton:

- The Escort Party had capacity to haul four weeks' worth of dog food and man food, enough for the round-trip to Mount Hooper (Supplementary material, Appendix A, "The often-overlooked second plan for the Escort Journey"),
- Surplus man-food at One Ton could have been fed to the dogs (see "The 'second obfuscation' - surplus food at One Ton" above),
- Some dogs could have been killed to feed the others, noting that the dogs did not need to be 'protected' for the next season (Supplementary material, Appendix A, "An alternative explanation for 'the dogs were not to be risked'").

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

May and Airriess stated their objective as "we shall examine circumstances leading to the failure to restock One Ton depot and the culpability of Meares". In my opinion, the early sections of their article provide useful background information about Scott's instructions and the dog journeys of 1911 and 1912. Unfortunately, the focus shifts in later sections to seeking out the worst that has been written or could be hypothesised about Cecil Meares and his alleged disobedience, neglect of duty and 'obfuscations'.

It appears the research effort has concentrated on finding evidence to support the claims of Meares' disobedience and neglect of duty. It is not clear whether significant effort has been expended on challenging the evidence collected and challenging the logical arguments employed, leaving the reader with lingering doubts about possible bias. This is similar to the concept of 'confirmation bias', which stops the gathering of information when the evidence gathered so far confirms the views the researcher would like to be true. Once the researcher has formed a view, they embrace information that confirms that view while ignoring, or rejecting, information that casts doubt upon it.

This commentary has shown that the three alleged 'obfuscations' do not stand up to scrutiny. The claims

about Meares' disobedience and neglect of duty which May and Airriess have derived from Simpson's and Cherry-Garrard's journals are based upon limited research and at least some of the supporting arguments are deeply flawed.

May and Airriess are strong in their conclusions about Meares' honesty and personal integrity. The conclusions are however based on hypotheses and assumptions, some of which are clearly flawed, with quite a lot of speculation and insufficient clear evidence from verifiable primary records.

The 2019 May-Lewis article draws on the 2014 May-Airriess article, apparently without re-evaluating its underlying research and analysis (May & Lewis, 2019, p. 8). It does not contribute significant new evidence about the subject areas examined in this commentary. There is nothing in the May-Lewis article to warrant a revision of the final paragraph of the ResearchGate version of this commentary:

I find it unsatisfactory for writers to be so sure in stating their conclusions with such a paucity of strong evidence. In my opinion, one needs to exercise caution in making accusations against individuals when there is no opportunity for those accused to respond, or to explain their versions of events.

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