

A SOUTH POLE JOURNEY IN 1933 WITH ADM. BYRD: Stevenson Corey recollects in 1997

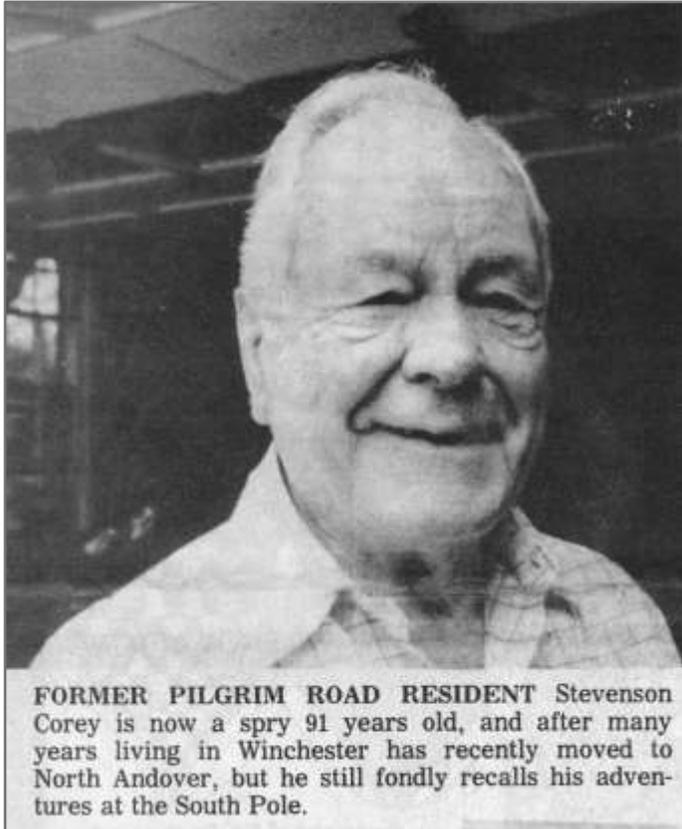
By Ellen Knight¹

Imagine climbing a mountain in Antarctica when your feet slip out from under you and you fall head first a thousand feet down a steep icy slope so covered by crevasses that the surface resembles a giant washboard. You're going so fast you fly over the tops of the fissures until an ice boulder abruptly stops your fall. With arms in front of you to protect your head, your hands crash into the boulder, cracking your wrist, and you hang over the edge of the crevasse.

You look to the right—deep blue. To the left—deep blue. Broken wrist or no, you have to crawl out by yourself because it takes your partner over an hour to cover the distance you covered in a minute.

You don't have to imagine if you are Stevenson Corey and you lived the moment. You remember that and all the other adventures and trials of an expedition to the Antarctic in 1933 with Adm. Richard E. Byrd.

TOO SMALL



FORMER PILGRIM ROAD RESIDENT Stevenson Corey is now a spry 91 years old, and after many years living in Winchester has recently moved to North Andover, but he still fondly recalls his adventures at the South Pole.

A Winchester resident since 1928, Corey, born (in 1906) and raised in the Bronx, says, "When I was a kid I used to get up at 5 in the morning and read in bed—Admundsen-Scott."

"It seemed like a challenge," he says. "I wanted to go and see if it was true. I wanted to see what they saw and see if the conditions really existed."

After his high school years were finished, Corey's father was transferred to Boston where Byrd was preparing for his second expedition. Corey learned that Byrd had acquired the loan of a storehouse at the Charlestown Navy Yard, so he went there to find out what was going on. He kept going back, every day, volunteering his help to the expedition's warrant officer, Victor Czegka, and learning everything he could.

Czegka knew Corey wanted to go on the expedition but told him that he wouldn't be chosen—he was too small. Nevertheless, Corey continued going, learning more about the operations, making himself dependable.

Then Corey volunteered to chauffeur Czegka, and the day came when they went to Byrd's headquarters. He met the admiral, and they got to talking about qualifications. Byrd himself told Corey he was too small. Still undaunted, Corey kept on working to make himself indispensable.

Eventually, he did. He took over Czegka's job and sailed for Antarctica. Still, not everyone who sailed stayed.

"You never knew if you were going to stay on the ice until you saw the ship sailing away. Everyone was on trial." Corey though had found the means to the end he wanted. He was the only man to know the supplies—he stayed.

DANGERS IN THE COLD

The expedition lasted a year. It was a busy time. "I worked outdoors all day long," he remembers. It could be taxing. "It gets so that fighting the cold gets tiring."

And there were dangers. There were, for example, crevasses covered by bridges of snow. Under the weight of dog sleds that bridges would give way. If the crevasses were small, the sled would just get stuck. If wider, the sleds could go down, and it would take hours to unload and get everything out.



Corey and Cindy in the Antarctic in 1933

NORTHEAST OF LITTLE AMERICA

The highlight of Corey's reminiscences was his participation in the Marie Byrd Land Party, a four-man sledging team sent for three months to explore an area northeast of Little America which Byrd had discovered by air in 1929 but upon which no man had yet set foot.

"The first mountain we came to I fell down." It was Mount Grace McKinley, where he took his thousand-foot slide. Team leader Paul Siple, who recounted the story of the whole expedition in his book *Scout to Explorer*, commented, "It was a miracle that he was not killed."²

For the rest of the 90-day trip, Corey drove his team of dogs with his wrist wrapped with adhesive tape. He managed to climb another mountain successfully—Mount Corey. "I climbed it. Only three other fellows climbed it," he says.

Four months later, the expedition over, Corey's wrist was rebroken and reset in New Zealand before heading back home.

THE END OF EXPLORATION

After his return, Corey went to work for Jordan Marsh, leaving behind exploration. Asked if he would like to return today, he says he is not tempted.

"There is no challenge. It is a challenge to go into an area for the first time. If somebody's already done it, it's not the same as being the first one."

Perhaps today's Antarctic explorers do the same things, "but we did it the hard way. We found out what worked by trial and error." Today it is too mechanized, he says.

"We were (mostly) volunteers. We did it for nothing, so you get a different attitude. A person giving a year and a half of his life or so will give more to it."

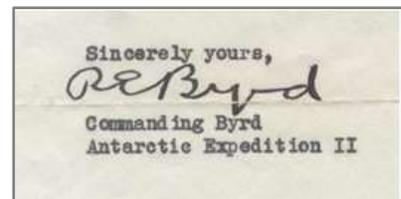
This month, Corey left Winchester, after seventy years, for a retirement home in North Andover.

Looking back to the Byrd Expedition, he concludes, "I did what I wanted. It was fun. Many times I wished I was anywhere but where I was.

"It was a challenge, and I measured up. On a personal basis, I accomplished what I set out to do and had some fun doing it."



*Adm. Byrd in 1930
Below: Byrd's signature from
the Winchester Archival
Center's collections*



Notes

¹ This article, © 2020 by the author Ellen Knight, was published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on July 2, 1997. Although Mr. Corey died in 2000, the tenses have not been altered.

² Paul Siple, *Scout to Explorer*, p. 163.