

Obituaries



Fig. 1. Sir Wally Herbert (1934–2007)

Sir Wally Herbert, (Fig. 1), who died on 12 June 2007, aged 72, was a polar traveller of renown: a romantic adventurer in the British tradition who had the misfortune to be born 50 years too late. Sadly, his hard won achievements brought him only transitory fame.

Herbert's greatest exploit was crowned on 26 May 1969, when two of his companions on his four man Trans-Arctic Expedition made a touch-and-go landing in the European Arctic after a journey of 3620 route miles across the Arctic Ocean from Point Barrow, Alaska, via the North Pole. The party had left Point Barrow on 21 February 1968, and the land they eventually reached was Vesle Tavleøya, a small rocky island off the north coast of Svalbard. They had travelled with four dog teams acquired in north Greenland, had spent periods of encampment on the sea ice during mid-summer and mid-winter conducting scientific work, and had reached the North Pole on 5 April 1969. During the journey they had benefited from the direction of drift of the Arctic Ocean pack ice.

Herbert had spent four years, mainly in England, but partly in North America, meticulously planning and preparing for his expedition, and seeking financial support. No item of equipment and food escaped his careful attention, and, in particular, the very robust dog sledges. The sledges were built to his specifications, based on the design of R.E. Peary whose claim to have reached the North Pole in April 1909 was later disputed by some including Herbert himself.

For so long a journey, both in distance and in time, massive air support was essential. Herbert rightly judged that this could only be obtained through a personal

approach to the Chief of the Canadian Defence Staff, the late General Jean Allard, whom he visited in Ottawa late in 1967. The expedition appealed to the general's sense of adventure and love of the outdoors, and long-range Hercules aircraft of the Royal Canadian Air Force were duly assigned to make airdrops over the summer and winter camps on the ice.

After touching land, Herbert had hoped to drive all four of his dog teams alongside HMS *Endurance*, sent to pick up the party in Svalbard waters. But this was not to be for, in deteriorating sea-ice conditions, stalked by polar bears, and still 40 miles from the ship he was forced to accept helicopter pick up of his party with all the dogs, sledges and equipment. For Herbert, it was an anticlimactic ending to his expedition, especially as it was at the time when men first landed on the moon. In the aftermath following a civic reception on the ship's return to Portsmouth, further anticlimax came when Herbert was billed by the Mayor's office for the sherry consumed! His *Across the top of the world* (1969) was, in his words, 'a book of eloquent omissions'.

Walter William Herbert was born in 1934, and spent most of his early life in South Africa and Egypt. At the age of 17, he was persuaded to join the Army by his father who claimed that 'every male relative on his side of the family since Sir Harry Hotspur... had been soldiers by profession.' Young Herbert signed on for 20 years with the Royal Engineers, which trained him as a surveyor and sent him to Egypt. However after three years service he left the Army in search of a more adventurous life, and wandered back to England via the Middle East and Mediterranean countries, drawing portraits for his board and lodging.

In 1955, during a humdrum life as a surveyor in Shoreham-by-Sea, the only nine to five job he ever held, he noticed an advertisement for surveyors with the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (now the British Antarctic Survey). His successful application for such post set his course for 25 years.

He spent the next two and a half years at Hope Bay station, near the northeastern end of the Antarctic Peninsula, mapping the region by long journeys by dog-sledge. In his most exciting journey, with a party of four, he crossed the Antarctic Peninsula to link up with a survey party from the west coast. The last part of the journey involved travelling a hundred yards along a narrow snow covered ridge, with steep drops of 1500 ft on either side. His name, The Catwalk, for the ridge and the name Herbert Plateau, later appearing on official maps of the area, commemorate his party's achievement.

Herbert returned to England in 1959, having spent nearly a year hitchhiking alone from Montevideo northwards through the Americas. He had lived and travelled rough, but 'failed to get the Antarctic out of my system'. In England, lecturing on his experiences gave him a modest income until, in the following year, he joined a summer expedition to Svalbard. While there, he received a cable inviting him to go to Greenland to acquire sledge dogs for the New Zealand Antarctic Expedition, and to transport these by US military transport via the mainland United States, Hawaii, Fiji and Christchurch to McMurdo Sound in the Antarctic where the New Zealanders maintained their Scott Base. He hurried from Svalbard to west Greenland, accomplished his mission and, towards the end of 1960, found himself at Scott Base in charge of a New Zealand field survey party for two summers and a winter.

In the first season, Herbert's party with dog teams were air lifted to a partly explored region on the west side of the Ross Ice Shelf, where they mapped an area of about 10,000 square miles. In the following season, looking for a more exciting challenge, Herbert had his party airlifted further south to the head of the Beardmore Glacier. He then set about surveying the mainly unexplored Queen Maud Mountains, lying to the eastwards, through which Roald Amundsen had, in 1911, and with great daring, forced a new route to the South Pole, to forestall Captain Scott, who was travelling up the Beardmore Glacier. Herbert's party succeeded in mapping an area of about 25,000 square miles, and in making the first ascent of the 13,000 ft Mount Fridtjof Nansen, used by them as a survey station. Towards the end of the season they descended from the polar plateau down the very steep Axel Heiberg Glacier, with its icefalls, the ascent of which had been the key to the success of Herbert's hero, Amundsen, the master sledge traveller. Herbert is commemorated in this region by the Herbert Range. He recorded his Antarctic years in his book *A world of men* (1968).

By the time he returned to England in 1962, Herbert had decided that the era of Antarctic dog sledging was coming to an end and that the romance of travel would soon disappear. The Antarctic was becoming too populated for his taste. Aircraft and tracked vehicles were being deployed more and more in support of major scientific expeditions in which he had no desire to participate. He now switched his sights to the Arctic, and the idea of a trans-Arctic expedition took shape in his mind, soon to be billed in the fashion of adventurers as 'the last great journey on earth'.

Late in 1966, Herbert with two companions undertook a training journey from Qanaq, in the Thule district of northwest Greenland where they wintered. After adapting to the Inuit style of dog driving, in the early spring the party set off westwards for Ellesmere Island, in Arctic Canada, with Inuit support for the first part of the journey. Lack of judgement and disregard of Inuit advice, caused Herbert to cross Ellesmere Island by a pass mostly windswept and clear of snow, instead of crossing by way of the ice cap. The dogs were forced to drag the sledges

over bare rocks. The crossing took four weeks instead of the standard four days. Men and dogs were in a starving condition when they reached the west coast on Eureka Sound, leading north to Eureka weather station. In the sound, Herbert swallowed his pride and accepted an airlift of man and dog food from the station that was eventually reached two months after leaving Qanaq. The party rested for 10 days and then continued with a 1400 mile leg north around Axel Heiberg Island to the west and south towards Resolute on Cornwallis Island. The imminent break up of the sea ice forced them to abandon their journey at a point 100 miles short of Resolute, whence they were brought by air. No doubt the hard won experience served Herbert well on his forthcoming epic journey.

Shortly after his return from the Arctic Ocean in 1969, Herbert was married and started to plan his next expedition. This was to Greenland to film the Inuit of the Thule district. From 1971 to 1973, he and his wife, Marie, and their small daughter made their home and base of operations near Qanaq on the coincidentally named Herbert Ø [Island]. Their sojourn there was described by Marie in her book, *The snow people* (1973), and led to Herbert's prize winning book *The Eskimos* (1976).

Meanwhile, Herbert had been maturing plans for another ambitious expedition, the circumnavigation of Greenland by dog sledge and skin boat. In the spring of 1978, he and one companion were landed at Alert, the Canadian weather station at the northeastern corner of Ellesmere Island, whence they planned to cross the channel to Greenland at the start of a journey of several seasons. After a long delay waiting in vain for solid sea ice conditions, they were eventually air lifted to the north coast of Greenland too late in the season to cover more than a few hundred miles clockwise round the coast, before abandoning the expedition that year. Lack of financial support in succeeding years finally aborted Herbert's plans.

In these years, Herbert was invited by the National Geographic Society to examine Peary's records of his North Pole journey and to write a critical article for the *National Geographic Magazine*. He took up this task with enthusiasm, to the extent that he expanded his article into a full-length book. His *The noose of laurels* (1989) is a well researched and scholarly study of Peary's life, in which he became totally absorbed. To his friends he virtually claimed psychic insight into the mind of Peary and a special affinity with the man, having discovered many coincidences between Peary's life and his own. Many would disagree with his conclusion that Peary reached no nearer than 60 miles from the North Pole. Herbert could not be considered an unbiased critic for, had Peary not reached the North Pole, then he himself would have been the first to reach, by traditional methods, that elusive point on the drifting pack-ice; an achievement that he coveted. Sadly the book was not a market success, but as a spin off, Herbert was invited to lead a filming expedition to northwest Greenland, Ellesmere Island and the North Pole in the summer of 1987 to obtain footage for a successful

TV documentary programme on the journeys of Peary and of his rival, the American, Dr F.A. Cook.

From 1980 for some years, Herbert made his home in Devon. For two years he was installed in Buckfast Abbey, the home of Sir Francis Drake, as Curator of a Museum of Exploration, which the Plymouth City Council proposed to establish there. Unfortunately, his plans for the Museum proved to be too ambitious and he parted company with the City Council and the Abbey. With his expedition days over and with pressing personal financial and health problems, Herbert now turned to painting as a means of livelihood. It had been a recreation in which he had shown great talent, notably for his portraits of polar explorers and Inuit hunters. At the same time he accompanied Arctic and Antarctic cruise ships as a guest lecturer, and acted in a similar capacity on trans-Atlantic voyages of *Queen Elizabeth II*, on board which vessel, and in other venues, he staged shows of his paintings.

For his achievements in the polar field, Herbert's awards included: the Polar Medal (with Antarctic and Arctic clasps), the Founder's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society, the Medal of the French Geographical Society, the medal of the New York Explorers' Club.

He was offered the CBE for his leadership of the Trans-Arctic Expedition, but clearly in expectation of higher recognition, he turned it down, acting with typical impetuosity, and thus making it doubtful that his name would ever appear again in lists of honours. However, Sir Ranulph Fiennes campaigned to secure him a knighthood, with eventual success in 2000. As noted above, Herbert is commemorated in the Antarctic place names Herbert Plateau and Herbert Range.

Wally Herbert was one of the hardest travellers the polar regions have ever known but he never cultivated the skills in public relations necessary in order to make a living as an adventurer. True to himself, he did nothing by halves, and overstretched himself physically, mentally and financially on his expeditions. Although heart problems did not quench his indomitable spirit, it was fortunate that, in later years, he could fall back on the gentler pursuits of painting at his family home at Laggan, Inverness-shire.

He is survived by his wife Marie, and elder daughter Kari, both authors of books on their time in North Greenland. A younger daughter, Pascale, died aged 15 in a tragic accident at the family home in Devon.

Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith

Gustavo Pablo Roberto Papazian (Fig. 1) was born in Buenos Aires on 6 January 1961. After education in his home city he trained as a commercial offshore oilfield diver at the College of Oceaneering Commercial Diving Center in California, USA. He specialised in non-destructive testing to ASNT level 1 in ultrasonics.

In 1998 he secured appointment as a diver with the Argentine Antarctic Directorate and overwintered at Base

Esperanza (Hope Bay). After one year in the Cayman Islands as a diving instructor, he returned south and over the period 1995–2001, he occupied many positions on expedition cruises as zodiac driver and manager and in expedition leadership positions. Among the ships he worked on were *R/V Akademik Sergei Vavilov*, *Akademik Ioffe*, *Professor Molchanov*, *Akademik Shuleykin*, *Lyubov Orlova* and *MV Disko*.

From 1997 to 2006 he was employed by Marathon Tours in the organisation of the yearly Antarctic marathons run on King George Island. From 2002 to 2004, he worked for OVDS (Hurtigruten) as Assistant Expedition Leader on board *MS Nordnorge*. Later he worked as Expedition Leader with an Argentine company running tours to the Antarctic Peninsula.

Papazian brought an infectious and cheerful enthusiasm to everything that he did, and he conveyed his keenness for all things Antarctic to very large numbers of tourists. Always very aware of the dangers facing the continent, he explained these matters clearly and simply and had the gift for making people feel that the continent really was the patrimony of mankind. He was especially good at developing levels of environmental awareness among tourists from his home country.

Among his other interests, he was a very knowledgeable collector of, and dealer in, antique watches.

His death in Buenos Aires on 31 August 2007, at a tragically early age, saddened his wide and international circle of colleagues and friends. He will be sorely missed.

Tomas Holik

John Chardine

Jim Garlinghouse

Ian R. Stone



Fig. 1. Gustavo Papazian (1961–2007).