



## CAPE ROYDS

### THE FIRST MOTOR VEHICLE IN ANTARCTICA

When Shackleton planned the British Antarctic Expedition 1097-09 he stated, "I do not intend to sacrifice utility of the expedition to a mere record-breaking journey, but to say frankly all the same, that one of my great efforts will be to reach the southern geographic pole". To achieve this and to assist in hauling sledges, Shackleton proposed to take ponies, dogs and a "specially designed motor-car".

He selected a 12-15 horse-power New Arrol Johnston car, fitted with a specially designed air-cooled, four cylinder engine. Other innovations included Price's non-freezing oil, a silencer to act as a foot warmer, the passing of the exhaust pipe through a hopper which could be filled with snow to provide hot water, wheels of special patterns, standard car wheels with conventional rubber tyres and ski runners for the front wheels to rest on.

When the car was unloaded from the Nimrod and given a trail run on the sea ice, the wheels became clogged with snow. Shackleton said, "the driving wheels were a great source of trouble; the heavy rear wheels sank into even the hardest snow". Eventually it became necessary to lighten the weight of the car and next spring, using rubber wheels with chains, mechanic Day was able to tow sledges over the sea ice for p to 14 miles (22 km) and return.

With departure of the expedition in 1909, the car was loaded on Nimrod for return to England but it appears to have not been unloaded. It is thought the vehicle was washed overboard in a storm. However some links with this pioneering vehicle remained at Cape Royds. Included are two experimental wheels. In 1908 they were still attached to an axle and on the shore near Pony Lake. They were recovered from the lake, by New Zealand Antarctic Society 'hut caretakers' in the 1970's.

Today one wheel is at the site of the former garage while the other, is exhibited in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand.

*Prepared for the Antarctic Heritage Trust  
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