

South Pole Adventurer

There was a Japanese team led by heroic explorer Nobu Shirase attempting to be first in a race to the South Pole.

In January 1912, Antarctica was filled with explorers for a few weeks. On December 14th Norwegian Roald Amundsen had reached the South Pole and went back to the coast. Robert Scott and the men of the British Antarctic expedition had arrived at the pole on 17 January to find out that they had been beaten to it. A third man then arrived - a Japanese explorer named Nobu Shirase. His part in one of the greatest adventure stories of the twentieth century is not known much outside his own country, even by fellow explorers. Shirase and his team sailed into Antarctica's Bay of Whales in the smallest ship ever to try its luck in these dangerous waters as Scott was nearing the pole and with the rest of the people not aware of Amundsen's triumph. Since childhood Shirase had wanted to become a polar explorer. He initially planned to go to the North Pole like Amundsen. But both men quickly changed their plans after the American Robert Peary claimed to have reached it in 1909. Instead they went to the South Pole. In January 1910, Shirase promised to raise the flag at the South Pole within 3 years and put his plans before Japanese government officials. The question for many of them wasn't whether he could do it but why it would be worth doing? The International Geographical Congress had said 15 years before that Antarctica, the last unknown continent, offered the chance to add to knowledge in almost every branch of science. Like the British, Shirase presented his expedition as a search for knowledge, making meteorological measurements and exploring unknown parts of the continent; he would bring back fossils.

Before Shirase, the British team declared their decision to carry out scientific research in Antarctica.

Even though the response from the government was positive, Shirase found it difficult to raise funds. Luckily a few months later, Japan's former prime minister Shigenobu Kuma came to Shirase's rescue. Shirase got together just enough money to buy and equip a small ship with Kuma's help. Later he eventually got a scientist named Terutaro Takeda. His ship the Kainan Maru finally left Tokyo at the end of November 1910 with 27 men and 28 Siberian dogs on board. Shirase confidently outlined his plans to the media before leaving. First he would sail to New Zealand in a ship, and during the southern summer in February he would go to Antarctica, and then proceed to the South pole during the spring. But bad weather was a hurdle to the expedition and they reached New Zealand only by 8th February. By that time Amundsen and Scott reached Antarctica a month before and were preparing for winter.

Local reporters in New Zealand were surprised because his ship was only half the size of Amundsen's ship. Although the ship was reinforced with extra wood and iron plate, the ship only had a small engine to go through the ice. Some doubted Shirase's courage, and few others considered the expedition to be ill-prepared as the Japanese had only lightweight sledges made of bamboo and wood for transport across the ice.

The biggest challenge faced by him was time. Expeditions usually aimed to arrive in January or February as Antarctica is only accessible by sea for a few weeks in summer. 'Our Japanese friends are running it fine with their determination and daring,' wrote local reporters.

Kainan Maru on February 11th left New Zealand and went straight into the worst weather the captain had ever seen. They approached the coastline of Antarctica's Ross Sea on March 6, looking for a place to halt. The ice began to surround them, which could trap them for the winter, an experience which no one will survive. The captain, who had a remarkable seamanship, steered north and escaped out of the ice. They would have to wait till the winter is over till the climate becomes warm again.

Shirase and 6 men finally reached Antarctica a year later. He had said he would stick to science this time but catching up with Scott or Amundsen was out of the question. As he had always dreamed, Shirase still felt the pull of the pole and decided he would head southward to experience the thrills and hardships of polar exploration. With 4 men and provisions for 20 days he would see how far they could get.

On 20 January 1912 Shirase set off with Takeda and 2 dog handlers, leaving 2 men at the edge of the ice shelf to make meteorological measurements. For a week they struggled through repeated blizzards, hiding in their tents during the worst of the weather. The temperature went to -25°C , and frostbite claimed the lives of some dogs. Shirase estimated there were enough provisions on 26th January to continue for 2 more days. 2 days later, he announced it was time to turn back. Takeda calculated they had reached $80^{\circ}5$ south and had travelled 250 km. They hoisted the Japanese flag.

All the men returned home on 3rd February. In June 1912 when the ship reached Tokyo Shirase was praised like a hero although he never reached the pole. Also he couldn't contribute anything to science. Nor did Amundsen, whose only interest was to reach the pole first. But the expedition of Shirase was heroic. Only one of 4 teams have gone so far south beyond 80° south, at the time. Also they did all this without the advantages the other teams had and without any previous experience.

South Pole Adventurer IELTS reading questions

Questions 1-5

Answer the questions below.

Choose NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from the passage for each answer.

1. When did Norwegian Roald Amundsen reach the South Pole?
2. What did Shirase want to be since childhood?.
3. How many dogs were there on the ship the Kainan Maru when leaving Tokyo?
4. What was the biggest challenge faced by Shirase?
5. When did Kainan Maru leave New Zealand?

Questions 6-10

Complete the notes below.

Write NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/ OR A NUMBER from the passage for each answer.

Shirase initially planned to go to the North Pole like **6**_____.

Shirase presented his expedition as a search for **7**_____

Shirase confidently outlined his plans to the **8**_____ before leaving.

All the men returned home on **9**_____.

Only one of 4 teams have gone so far south beyond **10**_____, at the time.

Questions 11-14

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the Reading Passage?

Write

YES if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer

NO, if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer

NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

11. Antarctica is only accessible by sea for a few weeks in summer.

12. Shirase defeated Amundsen in reaching the South Pole.

13. Shirase and 6 men finally reached Antarctica two years later.

14. Shirase was praised like a hero although he never reached the pole.

South Pole Adventurer IELTS reading answers with explanations

(Note: The text in italics is from the reading passage and shows the location from where the answer is taken or inferred. The text in the regular font explains the answer in detail.)

1. December 14th

Explanation: *On December 14th Norwegian Roald Amundsen had reached the South Pole and went back to the coast.*

2. Polar explorer

Explanation: *Since childhood Shirase had wanted to become a polar explorer.*

3. 28

Explanation: His ship the Kainan Maru finally left Tokyo at the end of November 1910 with 27 men and 28 Siberian dogs on board.

4. Time

Explanation: The biggest challenge faced by him was time.

5. February 11th

Explanation: Kainan Maru on February 11th left New Zealand and went straight into the worst weather the captain had ever seen.

6. Amundsen

Explanation: He initially planned to go to the North Pole like Amundsen.

7. Knowledge

Explanation: Shirase presented his expedition as a search for knowledge.

8. Media

Explanation: Shirase confidently outlined his plans to the media before leaving.

9. 3rd February

Explanation: All the men returned home on 3rd February.

10. 80°

Explanation: Only one of 4 teams have gone so far south beyond 80°, at the time.

11. Yes

Explanation: The biggest challenge faced by him was time. Expeditions usually aimed to arrive in January or February as Antarctica is only accessible by sea for a few weeks in summer.

12. No

Explanation: He had said he would stick to science this time but catching up with Scott or Amundsen was out of the question.

13. No

Explanation: *Shirase and 6 men finally reached Antarctica a year later.*

14. Yes

Explanation: *In June 1912 when the ship reached Tokyo Shirase was praised like a hero although he never reached the pole.*