

UNDER THE ICE

By
WILTON BAIRD

round a corner until they came to a doorway.

"Then," says Bryan O'Brien, "we switched on the electric light!"

"Shortly after we arrived, I heard a bell ring, and there on the wall I saw a telephone. I lifted the receiver and found Dr. Poulter, scientist to the expedition, talking to me from the kitchen 60 yards away."

The electric light and the telephone system had been buried in the ice ever since Byrd had left Antarctica five years before.

The batteries were the original ones not yet recharged. There was no rust on the instruments. Where every drop of moisture is frozen, there is no rust.

Telephone Plan

BRYAN O'BRIEN came back from the Byrd expedition after four months to New Zealand to attend to his business affairs. He was then a solicitor and could leave his practice no longer. Byrd wanted him to stay.

"You could do your business by wireless," he said to the young lawyer.

"But it is confidential, naturally," said Bryan O'Brien. "If I could only do it by telephone!"

Byrd called the electricians in and asked them if they could fix a radio telephone from Antarctica to New Zealand! If it could have been done, the young New Zealander might have stayed. Since it could not, he came back.

HE came back with the sense of having been in a wonderful adventure, of having experienced that unique sensation of all Polar explorers of being in a world utterly apart.

He came back too with the rooted conviction that not in his lifetime would man rob the Antarctic ice of its possibly stupendous wealth.

IT was this conviction that he expressed over the air and in newspaper interviews in Australia some few days ago when, during his leave in Sydney from 2ZB, the Australian Federal Government made public its proposal that it should consult the British and New Zealand Governments to see whether any commercial purpose could be served by organising an expedition to the Antarctic.

Sir Douglas Mawson was in favour of the plan. Sir Hubert Wilkins, Australian explorer, said that in Spitzbergen and Greenland mining had been carried on for some time. Bryan O'Brien, giving his views purely as a layman who had been to the Antarctic, disagreed with them. He told me why last week, on his return to New Zealand.

SPITZBERGEN and Greenland, he says, are by no means a parallel to Antarctica. Warm currents from the North Atlantic keep the west coast of Spitzbergen open to sea traffic practically all the year round.

Spitzbergen is only a short journey from Norway,



—S. P. Andrew photo.

BRYAN O'BRIEN.

"... The whole personnel would crowd on board for home."

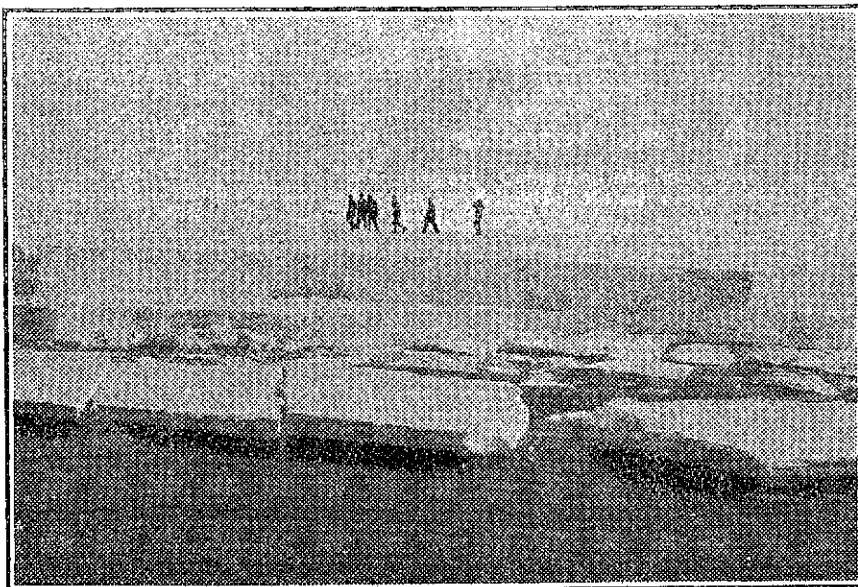
and Sweden, whereas the closest stepping-off place for Antarctica is New Zealand, over 1000 miles away over the roughest seas in the world.

There is a bare period of two months in which expeditions can be reasonably sure that the ice pack will behave and let the ships in to the Antarctic mainland.

In that time the expedition has to do all its unloading to get the supply ship away again before the ice freezes up.

WINTER temperatures in Spitzbergen range from zero to 8 deg. Fahrenheit. Even in mid-winter the temperature is not below zero. In the Antarctic sub-zero temperatures are common in mid-summer.

In Spitzbergen there is a population all the year round of Esquimaux and traders, the island has considerable flora—species of poppies and ranunculi and Arctic willow and dwarf birch; it has two species of birds which live there all the year round and dozens come there in the summer to breed.



DANGER IN ANTARCTICA.

.... From the Jacob Rupert, Bryan O'Brien took this photograph of Byrd's men running across the cracking ice to safety.

(Contd. on p. 30.)