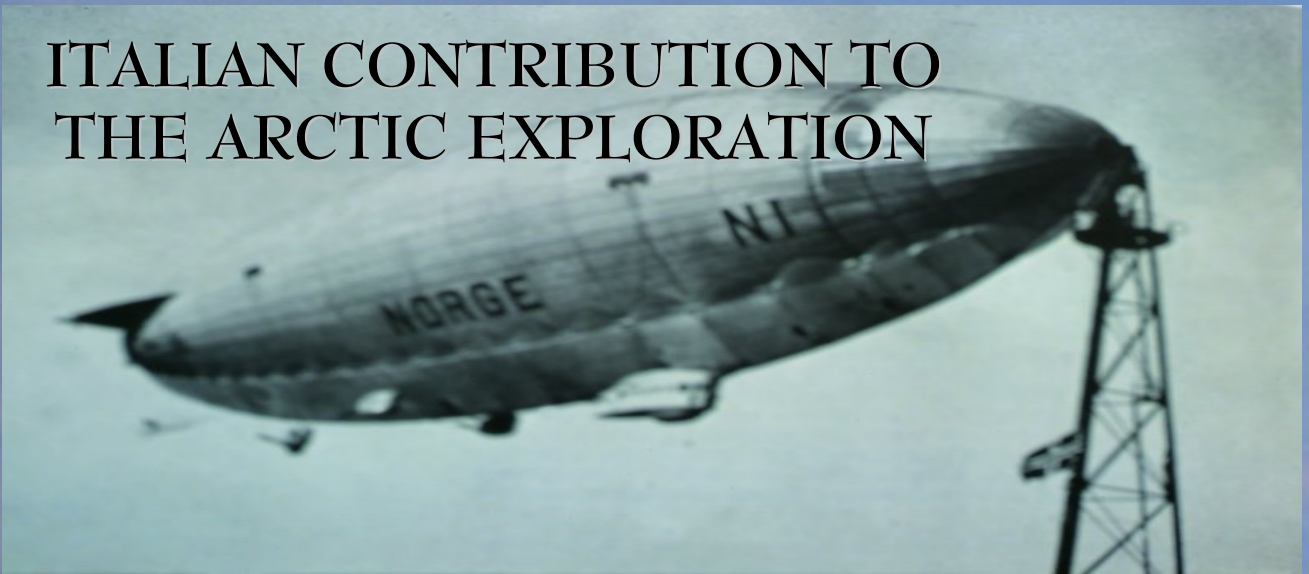


ITALIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE ARCTIC EXPLORATION



The history of polar exploration in the Arctic regions begins in June 1596 with the Dutch explorer Willem Barents, who was the first man to catch sight of the coast of Svalbard.

The first planned attempts of polar explorations were carried out by English explorers: in 1607 Henry Hudson with the ship *Hopewell* tried to cross the Arctic Ocean and reach Svalbard, but could not go further than 80°23' latitude North, in 1773 Costantin J. Phipps reached 80°48' N and William Edward Parry in 1827 reached 80°45' N on sledges.

In 1893 the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen went as far as 84° N on board of the ship *Fram* and then, after the ship was trapped in the icesheets, continued on sledged to reach 86°14' N.



Fram



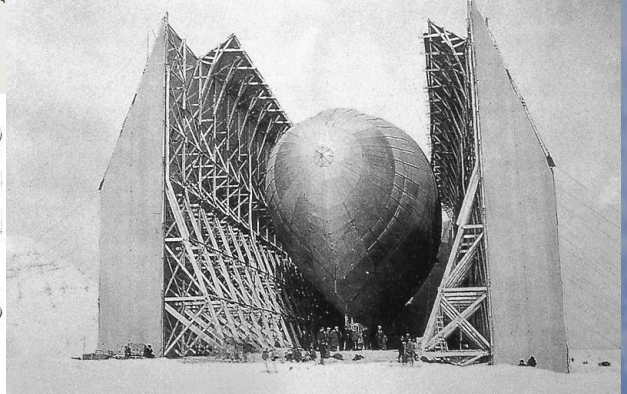
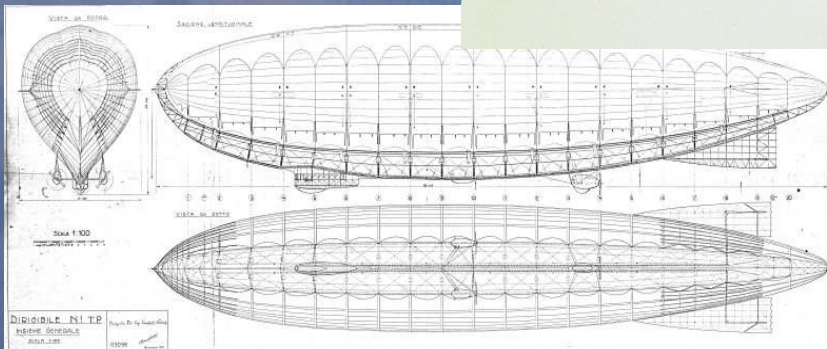
Stella Polare

From 1872 to 1900 Italian scientists took part officially in four Arctic expeditions. The last and more important was the *Stella Polare* expedition led by the Duke of Abruzzi, Luigi Amedeo di Savoia. The *Stella Polare* was a three-mast whaler, 40 meters long and 9,25 meters wide, with an engine capable to produce 60 HP. The crew was made of 20 persons, 9 Norwegians and 11 Italians led by Captain Umberto Cagni. The 13 July 1899 the *Stella Polare* sailed from Arcangelo and reached Cape Flora, south of Francis Joseph Land, went through the archipelago and reached Tepliz Bay, at the extreme North, where a camp was set up to withstand the winter. Commanded by Umberto Cagni, on 11 March 1900 a team of 13 sledges carried by 103 dogs moved towards the Pole. The march to the Pole lasted 47 days. On 25 April, when group had reached the latitude of 86°, 34' N, never reached before by any other expedition, Cagni decided to come back. The team had to endure chill and exhaustion for other 60 days before returning to the camp on 23 June 1900.

The year 1897 marked the beginning of aerial exploration of the Arctic: the Swedish explorers Salomon Andrée, Nils Strindberg and Knut Fraenkel reached 82° 56' N with their aerostatic balloon *Örnen* when their vehicle lost hydrogen quickly and crashed on the pack ice. Their bodies were found 33 years later, in 1930, by the ship *Bratvaag*.

The American Robert Edwin Peary, after having already reached the latitudes 87°06'N (in 1906) and 87°47' in 1909, claimed to have been the first person to reach the geographic North Pole on April 6, 1909. Peary's claim was widely credited for most of the 20th century, though it was criticized even in its own day and is today widely doubted.

On May 12, 1926, the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (the first man to reach the South Pole, in 1911), Umberto Nobile, General of the Italian Royal Air Force, the American manufacturer John Ellsworth and their crew carried out what many consider the first verified overflight of the North Pole. The expedition was carried out using a semi-rigid airship named *Norge*, designed and piloted by Umberto Nobile.



Umberto Nobile reached again the North Pole on May 23, 1928 on board of his new airship *Italia*, carrying out important topographic measurements and scientific observations. The airship, which departed from Ny-Ålesund, was heavily troubled by terrible weather conditions on its way back and crashed on the icepack only 250 km away from its destination. One crew member died in the impact, ten people survived and part of the crew (five persons) were carried away on the airship's envelope and were never found. The people who survived, including Nobile himself, spent nearly 40 days alone in the Arctic, using a tent fallen from the airship (the famous *red tent*) and sending SOS from a mended portable radio until their signals were caught by chance by a Russian radio amateur. After that, a huge rescue campaign was launched involving 6 Nations, 22 aeroplanes, 18 ships and over 1500 men. The fellow Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen also participated in the rescue operations, but fell with his airplane too and died in the impact.

The crew was finally rescued by the Russian icebreaker *Krasin* on July 12, 1928.

Today, a monument in Ny-Ålesund commemorates the victims of the airship *Italia* and those who died in the rescue operations: Renato Alessandrini, Ettore Arduino, Attilio Caratti, Calisto Ciocca, Ugo Lago, Finn Malmgren, Vincenzo Pomella, Aldo Pontremoli, Roald Amundsen, Rene Guilbaud, Gilbert Brazzy, Albert De Cuverville, Leif Dietrichson, Emile Valette, Pierluigi Penzo, Tullio Crosio, Giuseppe Della Gatta.