

HILLARY URGES RESTORATION OF MAWSON'S LIVING HUT

Mt Everest conqueror Sir Edmund Hillary, who reached the South Pole after a 1,200 mile journey on farm tractors in 1957, has strongly endorsed efforts to restore Mawson's Huts to their original condition.

"Heroes are not too common in this day and age, and great heroes like Sir Douglas Mawson are greatly to be admired and respected," he said.

"His hut at Cape Denison can be in a sense a memorial to a great Australian and should be restored to its original condition." Sir Edmund recalled visits he made in February this year to the splendidly restored Antarctic exploration huts of Captain Robert F. Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton.

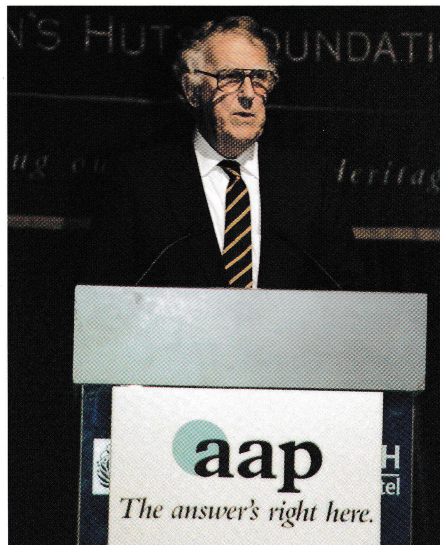
"We flew by helicopter to Captain Scott's hut at Cape Evans, which is in excellent condition after considerable maintenance by the NZ Antarctic Restoration Trust," he said.

"It was impossible not to be impressed with this journey back into history - back into the heroic age of Antarctic exploration.

"Then we flew north to Cape Royds, to Shackleton's hut. I had always admired Ernest Shackleton more perhaps than any other Antarctic explorer. He was renowned for his courage and skill in moments, or months, of great stress and danger.

"I had never been in his hut before and to go inside was a rather eerie experience. I had the distinct sensation that I was meeting face to face with my most revered Antarctic hero. I had never had such a sensation before and it was one I will long remember.

"The re-establishment of the Cape Evans and Cape Royds huts has I



Sir Edmund Hillary at the launch of the AAP Mawson's Huts National Appeal

believe been a very important historical event in the Antarctic," Sir Edmund said.

"As more and more tourist vessels sail the Antarctic waters, hundreds of people are being given the experience of visiting these relics of a bygone age in carefully controlled conditions.

"Last year I sailed south in the 20,000 tonne Marco Polo with a restricted passenger list of 400 people on board - mostly of middle age or indeed elderly.

"We cruised off Cape Evans while our 10 inflatable Zodiac craft took load after load ashore. The passengers had been warned that if they had any physical problems it was recommended that they stay on board ship.

"But not one of them did - the lame, the ancient and the decrepit all went ashore to gaze in awe at the contents of Scott's hut and then returned to the ship feeling they had just had a unique experience."

Public Welcome to Visit Huts

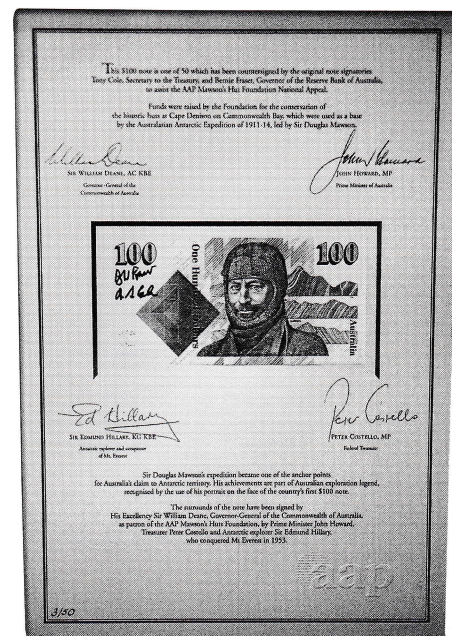
Berths are available to the public on a Russian cruise ship, the Akademik Shokalskiy, chartered by the AAP Mawson's Huts Foundation to transport the 10-man working party to Cape Denison and back next summer.

The first voyage departs Albany in Western Australia on December 10, 1997 and returns to Bluff, the port of Invercargill in New Zealand, on January 4, 1998.

The second departs Bluff on January 21, 1998 and returns there on February 16.

The voyages will allow the working party to spend six weeks at Cape Denison to carry out the most urgent restoration work on the huts.

The Akademik Shokalskiy, which carries 38 passengers, is under the command of an experienced team of Russian officers with New Zealand and Australian hotel and expedition staff. Built in 1983, the ship is 72 metres in length and is fully ice-strengthened.



Seven Icy Weeks to Save Mawson's Huts



Members of the expedition pictured outside their hut during a training camp at Cradle Mountain, Tasmania are (left to right) Dr Estelle Lazer, Joan Russell, David Gillott, David Killick, documentary cameraman Malcom Ludgate, Dr Rod Givney, Alasdair McGregor, Allen Rooke, Geoff Ashley, Rob Easther, Alan Grant and Ted Bugg in foreground.

Nine men and two women set out from Hobart next month to spend seven icy weeks camped on the edge of Antarctica, working to save the fragile baltic pine huts built by Sir Douglas Mawson and his expeditioners in 1912.

The AAP Mawson's Huts Foundation has chartered the Antarctic expedition vessel *Akademik Shokalskiy* from Southern Heritage Expeditions of Christchurch to carry the team, their supplies and equipment to Cape Denison and back.

The first voyage departs Hobart on December 11 and returns to Bluff in New Zealand on January 4, 1998.

The working party, led by Brisbane surveyor and landscape architect Alan Grant, includes AAP Sydney bureau journalist David Killick.

Other team members are conservation architect Geoff Ashley, painter and photographer Alasdair McGregor, archaeologist Dr Estelle Lazer, medical officer Dr Rod Givney, camp manager and chef Joan Russell, carpenters David Gillott, Gerard Bugg and Paul Delaney and communications operator Allen Rooke.

The working party will have 51 days at Cape Denison to complete the project which includes extensive work on the Main Hut used as the base for Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) of 1911-14.

The *Akademik Shokalskiy* leaves Bluff on January 22 on the return journey to pick up the team and lands them back there on February 16.

Spare berths on the ship, which carries 38 passengers,

have been sold to the public to help defray the \$750,000 charter fee.

Adventurous travellers, who have paid around \$12,000 each per voyage, will have several days to explore the site and be able to help the team unload supplies and set up base camp.

Mawson's main hut is now largely ice filled and sections are in danger of collapse from the weight of ice and snow. The roof too is in danger of being torn away by the fierce katabatic winds of up to 300 kph which sweep down from the polar regions and which caused Mawson to call Cape Denison "the windiest place on earth" and to title his book, "The Home of the Blizzard."

The AAE was a scientific expedition, which uncovered a wealth of information on Antarctic geology, biology, meteorology, magnetism and oceanography and used radio successfully for the first time on the continent to link with Australia.

It also established Australia's claim to a large slice of the polar continent.

When Mawson next returned to his huts at Cape Denison - in January, 1931 - it was at the head of the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE) during which he formally proclaimed the 42 per cent of Antarctica which is now Australian territory.

The AAP Mawson's Huts Foundation was established late last year to raise \$2 million to fund the most urgently needed work this summer and to establish a continuing care and maintenance program.

Daily Diary of The Expedition

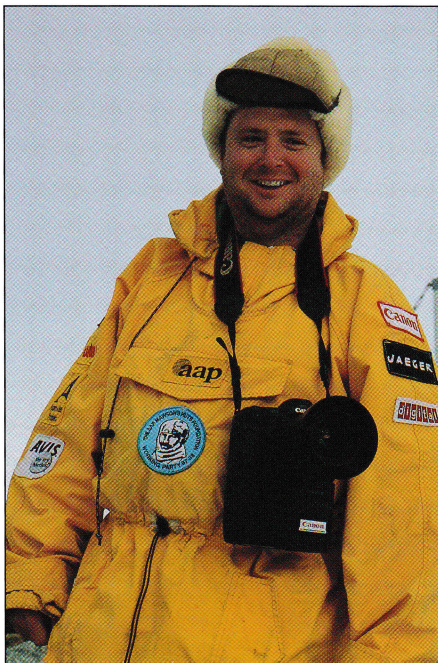
Spending an Antarctic summer reporting on the restoration of Mawson's Huts was "exhausting and exhilarating," but AAP Sydney Bureau crime reporter David Killick says he'd go back in a flash.

During the team's seven-week stay in the windiest place on earth, David wrote a daily diary and sent news reports and photographs of the progress of the conservation works back to AAP in Sydney for distribution to the Australian media.

David was also the backup cook and pitched in to help with the building works and other duties around the base camp - including emptying slops drums and gathering water in sub-zero temperatures and blizzards.

"Antarctica is a stunningly beautiful and wild place and the chance to go there was the opportunity of a lifetime for me," he said. "To see the huts and the wildlife and experience the ferocity of the weather up close was something I'll never forget."

The stories and photographs David sent back via satellite received wide play in AAP's subscriber newspapers. But the time spent at Cape Denison also provided a personal insight into



David Killick pictured with his top-of-the-range digital camera donated by Canon.

the Mawson legend.

"The trip really opened my eyes to the significance of Douglas Mawson and the men of his expedition in Australian history and to the importance of preserving the relics they left behind," he said.

"Standing in the spartan little bedroom Mawson lived in for two years you really get a feeling for the man and his achievements."

The AAP expedition members lived in tents throughout their stay. "I've done a lot of camping so being in the tents for that long wasn't such a problem - but with the 24-hour daylight I'd have to wear my balaclava backwards to make it dark enough to go to sleep," he said.

"We were able to have a 'shower' about once a week. You'd have to melt some snow and have a quick wash in a bucket. No-one really took long showers once the temperatures got down around minus eight."

After completing their work, the team was nearly prevented from coming home by the weather.

"The ship came in and all of a sudden the weather came up - a three-day blizzard with 180 kilometre per hour winds - and suddenly the jokes about being stranded for the winter - just as Mawson was - didn't seem so funny any more."

But the team was able to scramble off in an eight-hour lull in the wind, bringing one very relieved reporter back home.

David noted in his diary on Day 68 as their ship the *Akademik Shokalskiy* neared port:

"We are up early this morning for our last get-together as a team. Afterwards we shake hands and have our group photo taken. It's all but over.

"Rod Givney (the team doctor) and I retire to our cabin and start packing our masses of gear. It's been almost 10 weeks now that we've slept elbow to elbow in tiny tents

and ship cabins and never once has he offered a word of complaint about any of my noxious personal habits. An amazing performance. I will miss Rod, who has been great company and a voice of reason throughout the trip.

"What an experience we have had this summer. Even before the memories are shuffled and dimmed and distorted by time, I know this has been a trip I shall remember for the rest of my days - and as much for the people as for the place. Not one fight, never a voice raised in anger. Thirteen people flung into one of the worst places on earth and coming out friends."

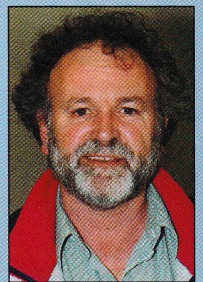
Antarctic Medal to Project Leader

Rob Easter, Project Manager for the successful AAP Mawson's Huts Foundation expedition to Cape Denison, has been awarded the Antarctic Medal, Australia's highest award for service in the polar continent.

The medal, the only one awarded this year, was in recognition of his many years of outstanding service in Antarctica since 1985 including as a station leader and in charge of field expeditions, rescue missions and ship voyages.

Rob, 54, who is deputy station and field operations manager with the Australian Antarctic Division in Hobart, was seconded to the AAP foundation for 10 months from the middle of last year to help plan the rescue of the historic huts built by Sir Douglas Mawson in 1912.

He will be back on the ice this summer, leading a six-week voyage, which will include several days at Mawson's Huts to assess conservation work carried out so far, to help clean up the site and plan for the next AAP expedition's work there in 1999-2000.



Rob Easter



The AAP Mawson's Huts Foundation team pictured (left to right) on the roof of Mawson's Hut are carpenters David Gillott, Paul Delaney and Ted Bugg. On the ice in front of the hut are film cameraman Malcolm Ludgate, director Mike Piper, Joan Russell, Dr Rod Givney, Allen Rooke, David Killick, Alan Grant and Geoff Ashley. In front of them are Alasdair McGregor and Dr Estelle Lazer.

Second Expedition Now Planned to Complete Work on Mawson's Huts

The AAP Mawson's Huts Foundation is planning a second expedition to Cape Denison in 1999-2000 to complete conservation work on the historic base camp established by Sir Douglas Mawson in 1912.

This follows the success of last summer's expedition to rescue the huts, which established that further restoration work is required once formal approval has been given by the heritage community.

Mawson's Huts stand as a proud memorial to Australia's long involvement in the Antarctic, and mark the birthplace of its claim to 42 per cent of the polar continent.

But 86 years exposure to the harsh Antarctic elements had left the huts on the knife edge of survival.

The AAP team reclad over the dangerously thin Workshop roof of the Main Hut with new Baltic pine planks to match the original timber used. They repaired or replaced skylights and skylight covers (one of which, over the workshop verandah, Mawson's men used for exit and entry when snow packed around the hut above the roof line) ridge

capping, valley gutters and apron flashings to limit the ingress of snow and summer meltwater.

They removed 41 cubic metres of ice and snow (about 30 tonnes) revealing an intact space in the Living area of the Main Hut and a light hatch and artefacts, including a pair of boots, above Mawson's cubicle and permitting access for the first time to famous photographer Frank Hurley's darkroom.

Mawson's Hut was found to be in good structural condition except for the central platform where huge ice loads had snapped the Oregon beams.

A bearer and two joists were replaced with new timbers. Two other joists were reused and new sections were scarfed into three of the four collar ties and joined to sound original timber with steel plates.

The stark Memorial Cross on the hill overlooking the site, dedicated to the memory of Belgrave Ninnis and Xavier Mertz who lost their lives on the Mawson expedition, was repaired, its cross arm excavated from ice and reattached using specially made stainless steel brackets.

The Magnetograph House remains intact and ice free and works were undertaken to exclude snow including the laying of a new roof over the original, rehangng the entry door and refixing the loose tar paper internal lining.

The Absolute Magnetic Hut and the Transit Hut were strengthened using original fabric that had been blown off and which was excavated from the ice, including the original stable doors of the former.

An army explosives expert detonated in a controlled manner away from the huts a cache of 1912 explosives and some emergency flares left by a 1960s expedition.

Ch 9 to Screen Documentary

The AAP expedition was accompanied by a two-man film crew from Prospero Productions in Perth and their one-hour documentary will be screened on Channel 9 later this year.

The film will be shown in the network's "Our World" timeslot on a Sunday evening.

The AAP Mawson's Huts Four



A wall of solid ice confronted team members when they opened the front door to Mawson's Main Hut. The ice was carved into blocks with an electric chainsaw then removed by hand.



The central platform of the main hut after most of the ice had been removed.



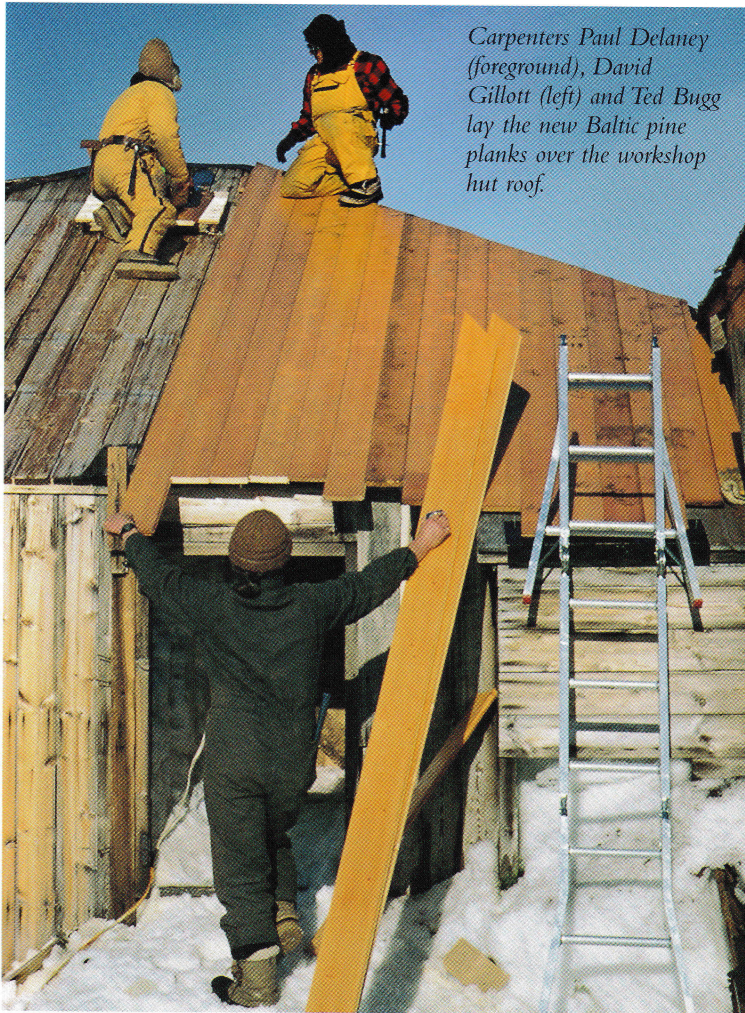
Alan Grant excavates the Husky remains found on the ice plateau above the huts.

Insert shows the abrasive effect of wind driven snow on the pole above the main hut.

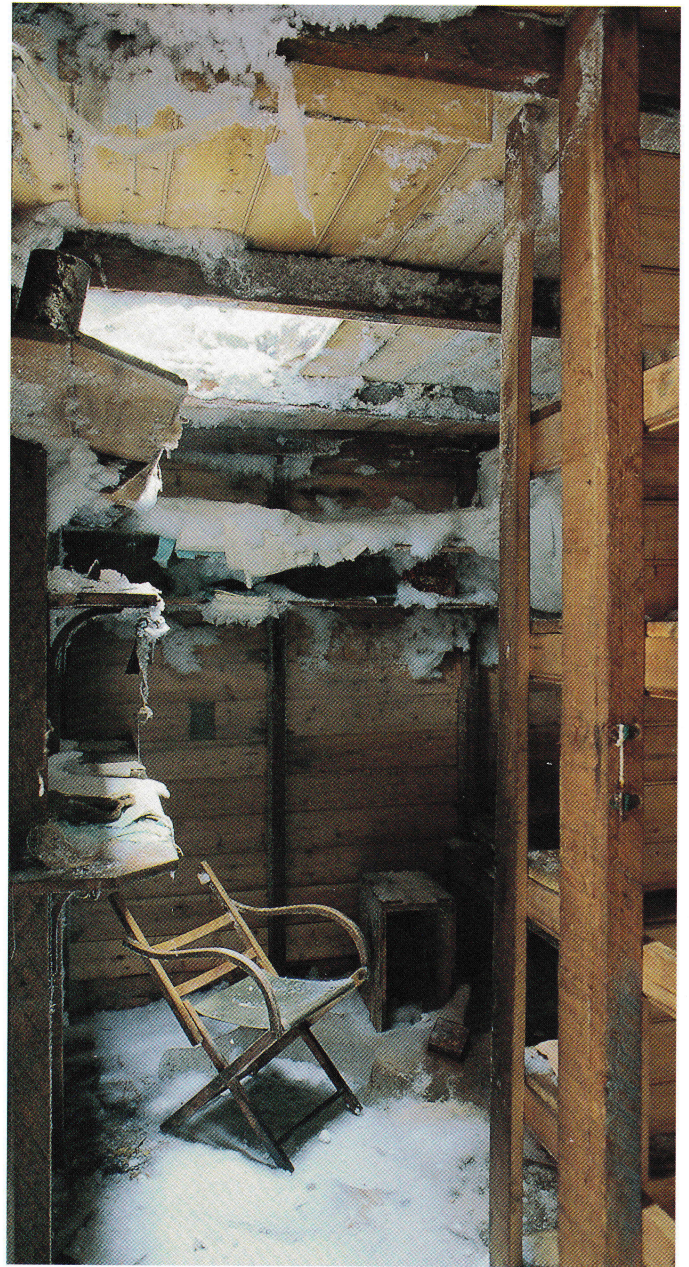


Ted Bugg, with Makita chainsaw, and Dr Estelle Lazer discuss ice removal from the central platform.

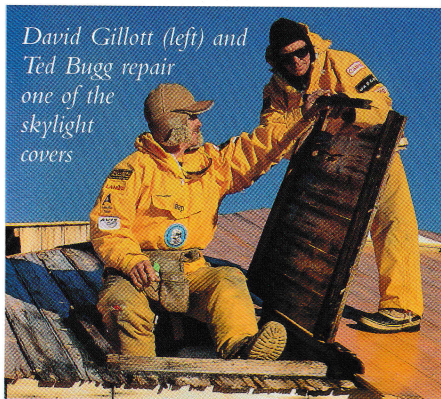
Expedition Team in Action 1997-98



Carpenters Paul Delaney (foreground), David Gillott (left) and Ted Bugg lay the new Baltic pine planks over the workshop hut roof.



Above: Sun shone into Sir Douglas Mawson's cubicle for the first time in 86 years when the ice was removed and the skylight cover above it was opened.



David Gillott (left) and Ted Bugg repair one of the skylight covers



Left: A blessed relief for the next expedition. This essential facility was completed just before the team left and never christened.



The new roof showing the huts proximity to Boat Harbour.



AAP team members displayed photographs of men of the AAE in their quarters.