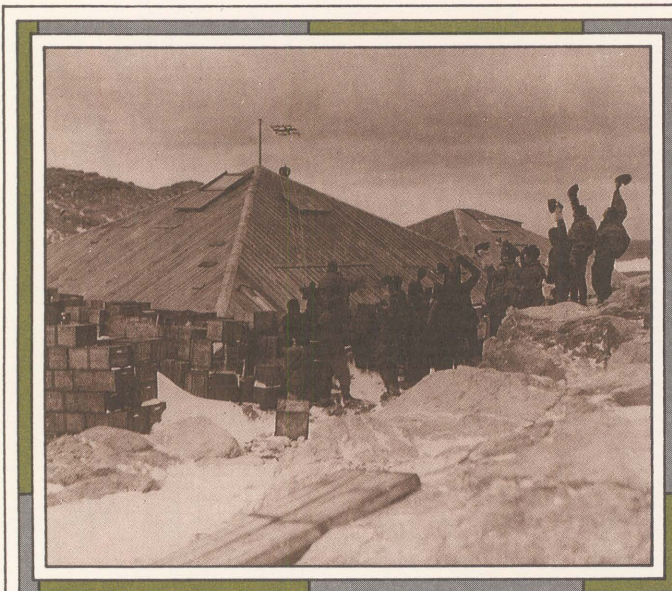


# AAE 1911-1914

The Australasian Antarctic Expedition was organised and led by geologist, Dr Douglas Mawson, and staffed largely by Australians and New Zealanders, thirty-one in all. Financially supported by the Australian and British Governments and a number of scientific societies and private individuals, the object of the expedition was to investigate the antarctic continent in the vicinity of the South Magnetic Pole. The expedition departed from Hobart on 2 December 1911 on board the *Aurora*, under the command of Captain J.K. Davis. A party of six was landed at Macquarie Island to establish a scientific base and wireless relay station before the expedition continued south to Antarctica. Hindered by pack ice, the vessel was driven further west than originally intended, but on 8 January 1912 a suitable anchorage was found. In the geographical narrative of the expedition Mawson wrote:

"About half a mile away to the east of the anchorage lay the rocky promontory where we were to land the main shore party. This projection appearing from under the great sheet of ice which covered the land we named Cape Denison after Hugh Denison of Sydney, one of the main supporters of our enterprise."



The completion of the hut — cheering the Union Jack. (Mawson Institute)

The site chosen for their permanent shelter was a rocky platform partially sheltered by a large upstanding rock. The site has become known as the windiest place on earth.

## THE MAIN HUT

Original plans were for a living hut to house twelve and a smaller hut to house a party of six. These two were amalgamated. The smaller hut was constructed in the lee of the living hut and equipped as a workshop and ante-room. Built to Mawson's design, a prefabricated Baltic pine structure, the main hut comprised one room 7.3m square, with the workshop hut comprising another 5.5m square (plan of hut is shown below). Entry to the living hut was via the workshop hut, the entrance to which was protected by the western verandah enclosure. Trap doors in the roof and tunnels through the snow-drifts allowed entry during heavy winter snow-drifts when only the hut roof remained visible.

Mawson's room and the dark room were the only divisions of the internal space. Sleeping bunks lined the perimeter of the living area. Under the central platform, which housed the acetylene plant and stores, were a large table and benches. The smaller hut, which housed the latrine and trapdoor access to the meat cellar. The eastern verandah was used to house the dogs. An aurora observatory was attached to the northern face of the workshop hut. Artificial lighting in both huts was provided by an acetylene generator feeding a number of gas jets. Four skylights in the living hut and two in the workshop provided natural lighting. Heating was provided by the main stove which was kept alight 24 hours a day. When snow covered the hut, a comfortable 5-10°C was maintained.

Separate huts were erected for the housing of instruments and equipment for the scientific programme.

## THE MAGNETIC ABSOLUTE HUT

Observations of the variations in magnitude and direction of the earth's magnetic field were made from the Absolute Hut as part of the magnetic programme of the expedition.

## THE MAGNETOGRAPH HOUSE

The Magnetograph House was purchased complete by the expedition for £16/15/- from Risby Brothers, Timber Merchants of Hobart. Thirty tons of rock were used in the construction of a solid stone wall around the structure, a task which took the entire party two days and was completed on 14 March 1912.

This hut is the only building on the site still weather-tight. It held the delicate instrument that continuously monitored the variations in the earth's magnetic field.

## THE TRANSIT HUT

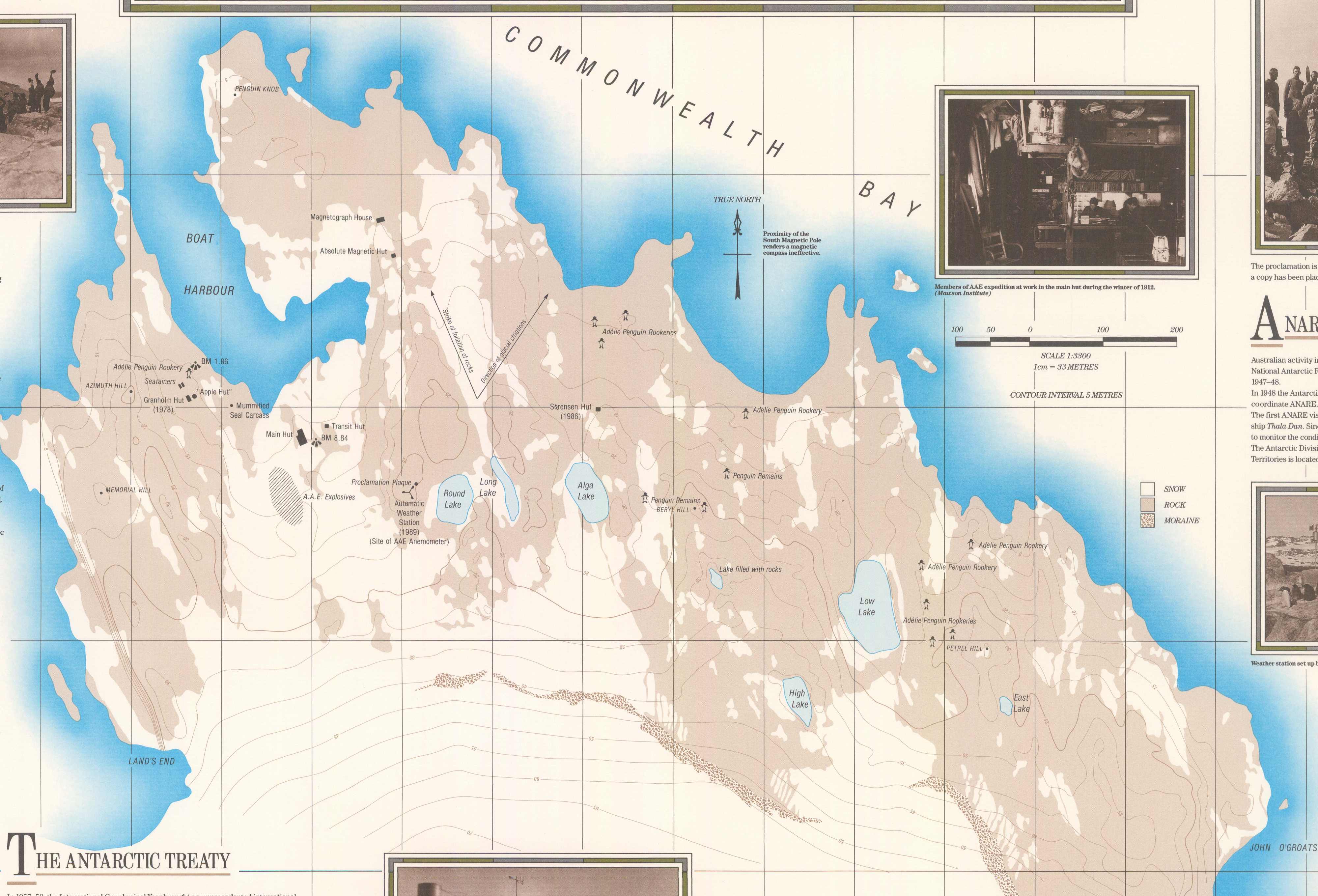
Erection of the astronomical observatory, the 'Transit Hut', began on 27 May 1912 on the eastern side of, and close to, the main hut. It served as a shelter for taking star sights by theodolite to determine the Cape's exact longitude.

## THE MEMORIAL CROSS AND PLAQUE

In the spring of 1913, a memorial cross and plaque were erected to Mertz and Ninnis, who lost their lives on a sledding journey in which Mawson was the only survivor.

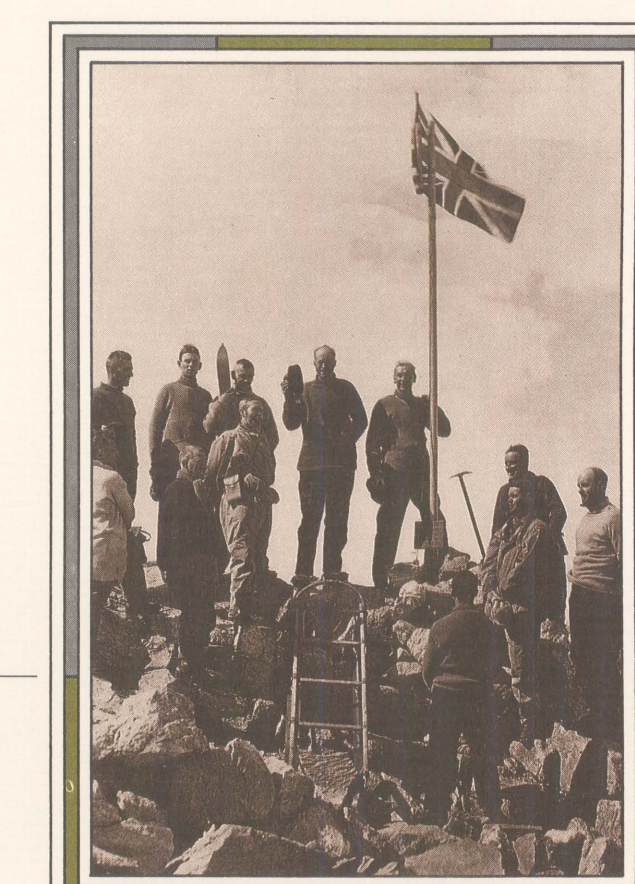
# CAPE DENISON HISTORIC SITE

## COMMONWEALTH BAY ANTARCTICA



# BANZARE 1929-1931

The British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expeditions (BANZARE) were also led by Sir Douglas Mawson (he was knighted in 1914). Two voyages of exploration were made during the antarctic summers of 1929-30 and 1930-31. On 5 January 1931 the expedition made a brief visit to Cape Denison. While the expedition was there they claimed formal possession of King George V Land. The report of the expedition recorded the event thus:



"At noon on 5 January the flag was hoisted on a rocky point overlooking the bay. In a casket at the foot of the pole a proclamation was deposited, claiming formal possession of King George V Land, defined as that section of the Antarctic coast-line as situated between the 142nd and 160th degrees of longitude and between latitude 66 degrees south and the South Pole."

Taking formal possession of King George V Land. (Mawson Institute)

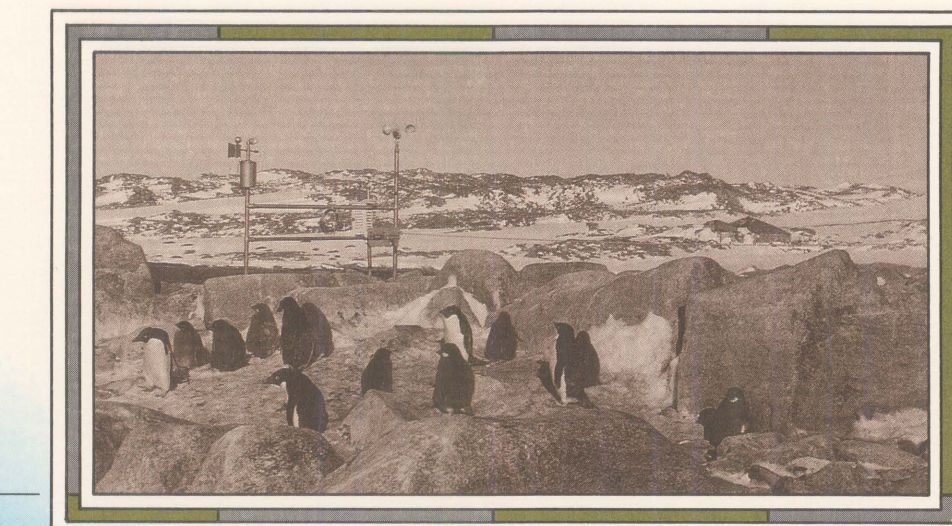
The proclamation is now securely stored in Australia and a copy has been placed at the proclamation site.

# ANARE 1947-1990

Australian activity in Antarctica resumed after the Second World War with Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) to Heard and Macquarie Islands in 1947-48.

In 1948 the Antarctic Division of the Department of External Affairs was formed to coordinate ANARE. Dr Phillip Law was appointed Director of Antarctic Division in 1949. The first ANARE visit to Cape Denison was made by Dr Law in 1962 from the expedition ship *Thala Dan*. Since that time there have been a number of visits by ANARE expeditions to monitor the condition of the site.

The Antarctic Division of the Department of the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism & Territories is located at Kingston near Hobart, Tasmania.



Weather station set up by an ANARE party during a visit in 1978. (ANARE)

## Erratum

1. The latitude value, 66°59'00" appearing at the top left and top right should read 67°00'00".
2. The location of the A.A.E. Explosives is approximate.

# GUIDELINES FOR VISITORS

Visitors are requested to observe the Code of Conduct for Antarctic Expeditions and Station Activities and the following specific guidelines in the interests of the long-term preservation of the site.

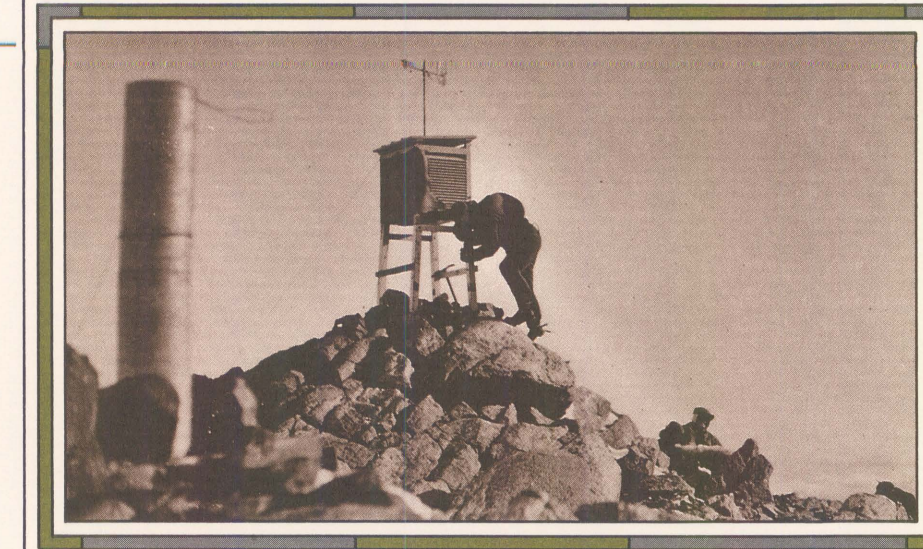
- Visitors should not attempt to enter or climb any historic structures.
- A plume of discarded objects radiates from the main hut to Boat Harbour and beyond and includes building materials, domestic and scientific artefacts, food containers and clothing. Areas where artefacts are concentrated should be regarded as entirely off limits.
- Groups of visitors coming ashore at the site at one time should be limited to manageable numbers (no more than 20).
- Visitors may find evidence of archaeological work being done in selected locations around the site. Please do not interfere with the research by disturbing these locations in any way.
- No litter is to be left in the area. All waste should be returned to your ship for disposal in its home port.
- Other than photographs and memories, nothing should be disturbed, handled or taken from the site. This includes geological specimens and animal remains. Proposals to remove material must have the explicit permission of both the Australian Antarctic Division and the Australian Heritage Commission.
- ANARE field huts in the vicinity should not be used by private expeditions except in the case of an emergency and their use must be reported to the Australian Antarctic Division as soon as practicable. Failure to do so may compromise the safety of others.
- To prevent the transfer of non-indigenous species to the Antarctic continent, ensure that equipment and personal clothing are free of soil and vegetable matter and take only processed, packaged food items ashore. Avoid poultry products of all kinds.
- South west of the main hut are caches of explosives from the AAE. Note that the approximate area of the explosives is marked on the map. In the interests of safety please avoid this area.

# THE ANTARCTIC TREATY

In 1957-58, the International Geophysical Year brought an unprecedented international interest in Antarctica. So successful was it, not only in scientific terms but also in international cooperation, that the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research was set up to continue the scientific programmes. In 1961 the Antarctic Treaty entered into force. Australia is an original signatory to the Antarctic Treaty and is committed to the environment protection provisions agreed under the Treaty System. Visitors should familiarise themselves with the Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora, and the Code of Conduct for Antarctic Expeditions and Station Activities. Copies may be obtained by contacting the Australian Antarctic Division, Channel Highway, Kingston, Tasmania 7050, Australia.

# CAPE DENISON HISTORIC SITE

The area of Cape Denison, King George V Land, which contains evidence of the occupation of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) of 1911-1914, extends from John O'Groats to Land's End and from the edge of the ice cap north to the coast line. Contained within this area are the remains of structures and artefacts associated with the expedition and its scientific endeavours. The huts and the artefacts scattered around them are important for their association with the 'heroic age' of antarctic exploration and scientific research. Mawson's expedition was one of the last of that period. As an archaeological resource, the significance of the site lies not only in the intrinsic historic value of the artefacts but also in the insights they provide into human behaviour in antarctic conditions and the provisions and equipment available to the expedition in the early twentieth century. The huts and artefacts are protected under the Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975, having been placed on the Register of the National Estate in 1979. This site is a designated historic monument under the Antarctic Treaty.



Madigan visiting the anemograph screen in a high wind. (Mawson Institute)

# SAFETY

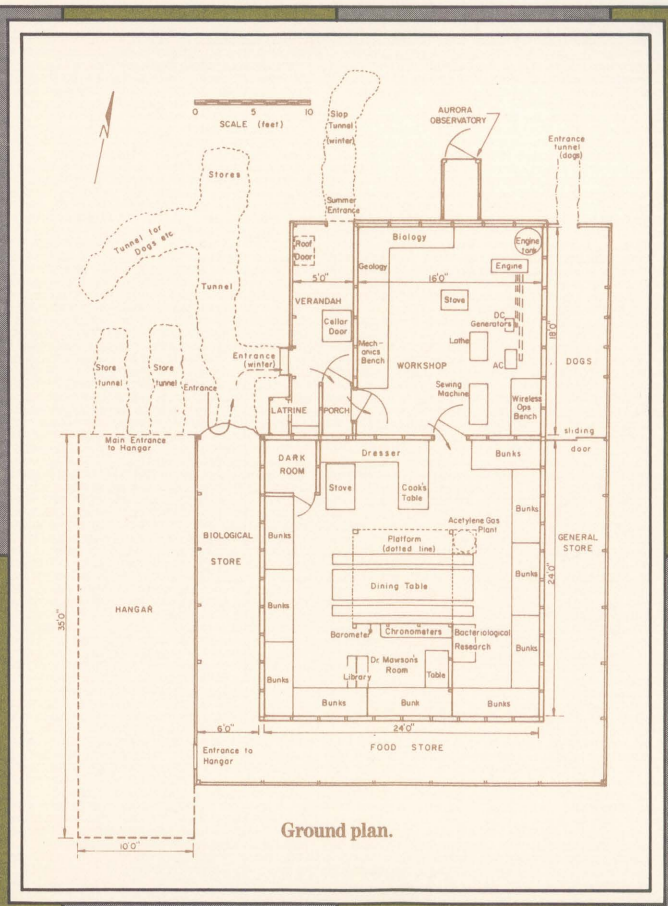
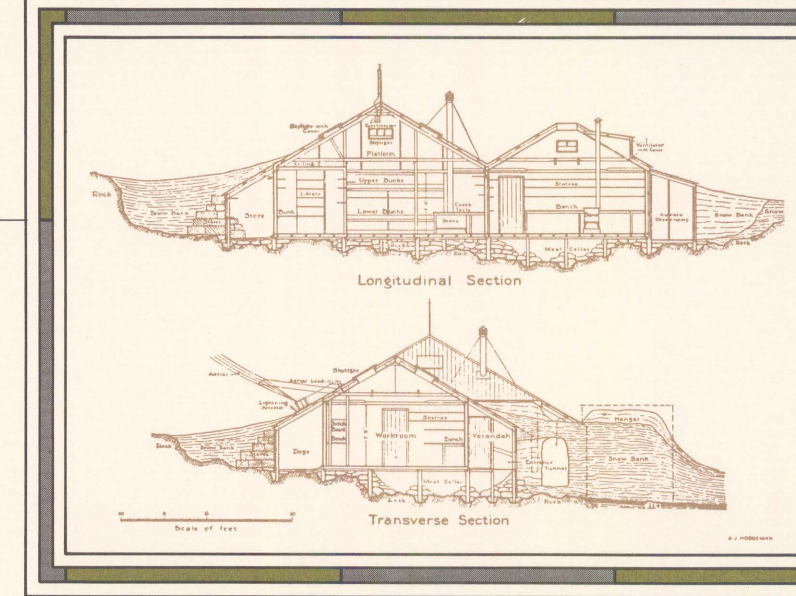
**EXPLOSIVES.** Please see note in Guidelines to Visitors and keep out of the area marked on the map.

**KATABATIC WINDS.** Katabatic winds are gravity fed winds which flow down the ice slope from the south. Cape Denison is notorious for the severity of this phenomenon. At Cape Denison gusts of 240 kilometres per hour and above have been recorded. The most probable first warning of an approaching katabatic wind is a plume of blowing snow off the glaciers to the west.

**CREVASSES.** There are crevasses in the glacier to the south of Cape Denison. It is strongly recommended that visitors stay on the rocks of Cape Denison itself unless they are prepared and equipped for glacier travel.

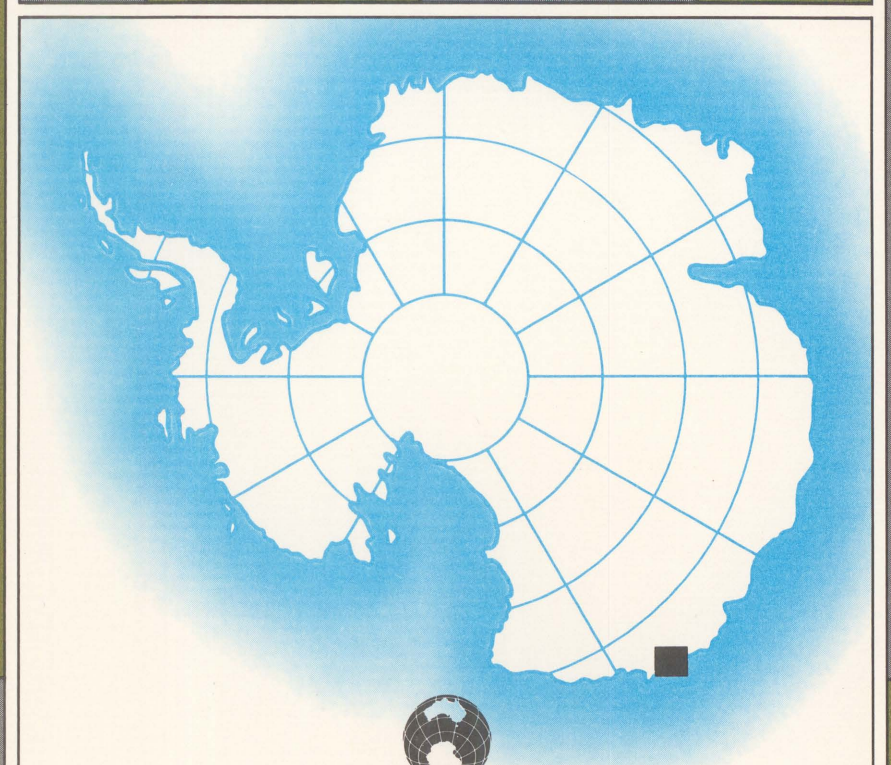
## SUGGESTED READING:

- AAE  
Douglas Mawson, 1915. *The Home of the Blizzard*. Heinemann.  
Charles Lazenby, 1947. *South with Mawson*. Australasian Pub. Co.
- BANZARE  
Harold Fletcher, 1984. *Antarctic Days with Mawson*. Angus and Robertson
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Phillip Law, 1983. *Antarctic Odyssey*. Heinemann.  
Phillip Law and John Béchervaise, 1957.  
ANARE. *Australasian Antarctic Outposts*. OUP.



# CAPE DENISON HISTORIC SITE

## COMMONWEALTH BAY ANTARCTICA



Produced in November 1990 by the Australian Surveying & Land Information Group  
Department of Administrative Services, Canberra  
for  
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Department of the Arts, Sport, the Environment,  
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