

# Sydney Midwinter Dinner 1998

The original plan was to hold a midwinter dinner with a minimum of formality, then came the news of the Antarctic Service Medallions! This provided the opportunity to honour those earlier expeditioners, who had not previously been recognised for their contribution to ANARE, by presenting the award at this dinner.

"Homers" commenced at 6.30 pm on Saturday 27 June and the evening was off to a convivial start. Before proceeding with the dinner, the renowned David Ellyard, as MC for the evening, chaired the AGM, Trevor Olrog, President of the NSW Branch confirmed his earlier decision to stand down from Council. His years of sterling work for the Club were recognised with acclaim. the 1998-99 NSW Council was elected and comprises Col Christiansen (President), Bill Burch, Lucinda Coates, Richard Roy, Kit Scally, Richard Stephens, Neville Smethurst, Bill Storer and Steve Symonds.

Expeditioners and guests and, in particular, the guest of honour Senator the Honourable Ian Macdonald, Parliamentary Secretary for the Antarctic, and his wife Lesley were welcomed by Trevor. With regards to the award of medallions, Trevor acknowledged the presence of Helden Powning and Helen Vincent who were to accept the award for their brothers Richard Hoseason and Robert White. Richard who died at Heard Island in 1952, and Robert who died at Mawson in 1963, are names well known to ANARE expeditioners. their graves are stark reminders, to visitors to Heard Island and Mawson, of the isolation and the dangers that exist in the Antarctic.

Trevor thanked the NSW Council for their work and support throughout the year and spoke of worthy causes supported by the NSW Branch which include the Leopard Seal Project at Taronga Zoological Park, the Mawson Antarctic Collection appeal and AAP Mawson's Huts Project.

Helen Vincent proposed the toast to ANARE with special mention of serving expeditioners now in the Antarctic. Helden gave an insight to the initially happy and rushed departure of her big brother and the great sadness as Robert's illness unfolded.

The response was given by Senator the Honourable Ian Macdonald. The senator thanked those Club members who, as former expeditioners, had given input to the Antarctic Science Advisory Committee (ASAC) Report. He then related some items of interest from the Government's response to that report. He referred to the challenge for the Antarctic Division to implement the ASAC recommendations and retain Australia's status as a leading Antarctic nation through to the next millennium.

During the course of the evening expeditioners and guests were interested to hear Colin Christiansen describe his recent round trip to Mawson and Davis on the *Aurora Australis* as the Club's representative. It is of interest to note that Colin won the "icebert sweep"; one of the benefits of antarctic experience.

Al Rooke, who had recently returned from Commonwealth Bay, spoke of the AAP Mawson's Huts Project. He gave a vivid description of the work and experiences during the course of the seven week project where morning katabatics made the working conditions quite arduous. Overall, the huts were in good condition. The main hut's uprights were found to be within 3-5mm of the specifications, even after 85 years of constant katabatics. The expedition architects initially considered, as many people had, that the ice inside the building was actually providing support. It is now apparent that the main hut is reasonable sound and the structure is not dependent on the ice for support. This means that the first kit home to be exported from Australia to Antarctica was an unqualified success!

The Antarctic Service Medallion was awarded to 42 expeditioners and families by Senator Ian Macdonald. Presentation of the awards was undertaken by station, namely, Heard Island, Macquarie Island, Mawson, Davis and Wilkes. Families accepting awards included those of the late Lem Macey, Daniel Sweetensen, Bill Cartledge, Nev Woods and Keith (Curley) Watson. The Senator referred to the Government's appreciation of the hardships experience by wintering expeditioners in the isolated, harsh and potentially dangerous environment of the Antarctic. He also spoke of an awareness that the hardships would have been felt even more keenly by expeditioners, such as those receiving the award at this dinner, who wintered in the early days of ANARE.

All recipients were given the opportunity to "spin-a-yarn" revealing some wonderful anecdotes. Arthur Gwynn outlined in most unusual terms the circumstances of his and Otakar Recs emergency dash to Heard Island in 1950. Now we know the origin of those appendix stories. Incidentally, Otakar and his patient Jack Starr of the great 1951 Heard Island appendix operation were both present at the dinner. [A gutsy story](#)

This NSW Midwinter Dinner had expeditioners from 1947 to 1999 in attendance. A notable guest was Rudi Seveik who wintered with the South African National Antarctic Research Expedition at SANAE in 1973.

The Call of the Years brought forward an interesting aspect. Bob Sutton arose for Macquarie Island 1965 and then to everyone's surprise, stood up again for Mawson 1999. Is this 34 year interval between wintering expeditions a record?

At the evening's conclusion it was evident that, despite the full program, the 160 persons attending enjoyed themselves. It was certainly pleasing that so many expeditioners were present to receive the award of the Antarctic Service Medallion. The NSW Branch Midwinter Dinner next year will be held in Sydney on Saturday 26 June 1999

by Colin, Lucinda and Trevor