

# Sydney Midwinter 2002

- 22 June 2002

- Lucinda Coates, with assistance from John Lavett, Bill Burch, Ken Batt and Stu Fitch

Cello's Restaurant (in the Castlereagh Inn) proved an excellent venue. We had many compliments on the night and since from satisfied customers! The décor was elegant, and also very colourful after the NSW council members had finished inflating many balloons with helium and tying them to the weights specially crafted by Paddy Butterworth (M 87, 91). With planning, forethought and a dose of luck (because you can never tell, with the A factor) we were ready to receive our guests before they were due, and the entire evening ran more or less smoothly.

The President extended a welcome to all attendees, especially to the members of the 30th ANARE to Casey 1977, who were celebrating their 25th anniversary. David Ellyard attended to the duties of Master of Ceremonies as only David can. The AGM was held and the committee for 2002/03 are - Lucinda Coates (President), Paddy Butterworth, Col Christiansen, David Ellyard, Catherine King, Kit Scally, Phil Silvestro, Hilton Swan and Bob Taylor. It was noted, later in the evening, that Bill Burch (W61), a former Club president, had been attending Sydney (and other) Midwinter dinners for 40 years!

David (M66) proposed the Toast to ANARE. He made a plea for more recent expeditioners to join the Club ranks (it was noted that, even though over a dozen attendees had served with ANARE from the 1990s onwards, the Club in general has a dearth of new expeditioners joining up). Stu Fitch (HI 00/01) related some very interesting tales of his sojourn there. Reading Arthur Scholes' book *Fourteen men: the story of the Australian Antarctic Expedition to Heard Island*, Stu found the same things described therein (an elephant seal banging on the hut; willy-waws generated off Lauren Peninsula tearing through the camp) happening to him as he read about them, not 100m from where Arthur and his comrades had been in Admiralty Hut. Also of being seated with the person who drove the tractor which is now a rusting hulk amidst the Kerguelen cabbage. Stu recounted the intimate sense of brotherhood engendered by five months of fairly hard conditions in close quarters.

Stu writes...

As the 'new boy' on the block and the person asked to Toast the Expeditioners, I felt both nervous and a little intimidated, especially as there were ANARE Club members present who had more decades of membership than I had months. None more so than John Lavett and Peter Blaxland, who shared their table with me and their fascinating experiences on Heard Island, 55 years ago, and Hugh Doyle, a winterer at Heard in 1950-51. It was a great privilege to meet and talk with these men (and many others in the Club), a precious part of the 'living history' that all in the ANARE Club represent.

Lucinda and council members Kit, Paddy, Col, Phil, Hilton and Catherine did a fabulous job with the MWD, with David as MC keeping things humming with formal proceedings on the night. Everything was well organised, and there was much attention to detail that gave a very professional finish to the night. It was really enjoyable. Give yourself a BIG pat on the back for a first class dinner. I look forward to joining the MWD in 2003, and sharing more reminiscences from the South and the not-so-South.

Some thoughts from Bill Burch (W61):

Although the numbers were down on previous years the enthusiasm among the Explorers and their partners was well up. The environment of the beautiful Heritage-listed dining room complemented the gathering, and one could have visualised Mawson holding a fund raising dinner a century ago in just such a setting. Mike Williamson's obvious enthusiasm and respect for Antarctica was very evident in the entire presentation of his voyage to Casey and Wilkes as an introduction to the clean up program.

Lucinda Coates and her team did wonders with table decorations and other props, and the little sales table on the side of the room seemed to do a steady business. It was very pleasing to note two of the 47/48 Heard island party, John Lavett and Peter Blaxland, making their very welcome presence felt. It was a nice touch to have 50 years of Heard Island occupancy marked by the Toast to the Expeditioners by Stu Fitch (HI 2000/01) and the Response by Hugh Doyle HI 1950/51).

From Kenn Batt (C77):

The evening can be summed up as just fantastic. It was great to return to the Midwinter fold after an absence of some five years. I particularly enjoyed myself because it was spent at a table with eight of my buddies and their spouses from Casey 1977. It was our 25th reunion! (It's just grand that this forward-thinking Branch allows spouses etc to attend the Midwinter's celebration.) I was very taken by the presence of some of the 1947 Heard Island and older expeditioners.

Mike Williamson from Collex put on a great show and it was pleasing to see that they are doing something very constructive about removing old wastes from Thala Valley at Casey and from the old Wilkes Station. Also enjoyable were the tales from the past, which were presented by various past expeditioners.

Congratulations and many thanks Lucinda and helpers for organising the evening. I would also like to thank my fellow Casey 1977 expeditioners for making the BIG effort to come to Sydney for our reunion. It was a very moving experience for me to see you all and chat about the "good old days". Thanks guys you are just tops!

Our guest speaker was Mike Williamson from Collex, who had travelled to Casey on the eventful V5 resupply voyage of 2001/02, on the Aurora Australis. Mike had an ingenious PowerPoint presentation (which included embedded pictures and video footage) of the joint venture being undertaken by Collex and the Antarctic Division re waste remediation. Collex have provided \$2 000 000 towards purpose-built waste containers as part of a 10-year program to clean up years of rubbish that have accumulated on the continent. The Thala Valley rubbish tip (near Casey) has been chosen as a case study site as, at ~2 500m<sup>2</sup>, it is relatively small and manageable. [The rubbish tips of Wilkes represent a far greater problem in terms of size - eg, over 3 000 of 44-gallon drums - and accessibility.] 73 of the first load of 120 containers came down on V5. The remainder will be transported this summer, and loading of the containers with rubbish is expected to commence in September 2003. One of the problems being managed is leaching of waste via meltstreams - this is being met by the construction of containment dams.

V5 boasted a small complement of 20 crew + 40 expeditioners (including 13 Casey winterers) on its first leg. After the Casey resupply and checking out the rubbish situation, the

AA (with numbers swelled by the Casey summerers) saw off various Japanese whaling vessels and South American tuna/long-line fishing boats. The Mawson complement of expeditioners was then ferried from the Polar Bird to Mawson Station (again swelling the ranks), after which the ice-bound Polar Bird was extracted. It had been beset in Prydz Bay for five weeks - a northerly wind and some team precision icebreaking on part of the AA crew ensured success, even though the last 200m took eight hours.

Wilkes Station (on Clark Peninsula, Wilkes Land, named for United States Navy Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, who first discovered land there in 1839/40) was built by the Americans in 1957 and handed over to Australia in January 1959 as the US presence was scaled down. As heavy snow continually built up around the buildings, work eventually began on a replacement station some 2km south on the Bailey Peninsula. Only the roofs can now be seen of most of the Clarens and Jamesway huts. Wilkes has now been placed on an indicative list of the heritage register. The building of Repstat commenced in 1964 (our MC was part of the construction team). Repstat became fully operational in February 1969 and was named for Lord Casey, Governor-General, who had been a strong supporter of Australia's Antarctic Program through a period of great development. Winds took their toll on the "Tunnel", and Casey was rebuilt 1km distant at the NE end of Vincennes Bay (which Mawson named after Wilkes' ship). It was officially opened in December 1988.

Later in the evening Sue Hunt, Curator of the Museum of Sydney, gave notice of an Antarctic exhibition sponsored by Collex which will be showing from December 2002 to 31 January 2003. The exhibition will be entitled, "The Lure of the Southern Oceans" and will be based on the exploration of French navigator Dumont d'Urville. It will also include contemporary issues in Antarctica including sustainable waste management.

The Call of the Years had representatives from 1947 to 2002. In fact, for only 13 of the 56 years called did no expeditioners stand. John Lavett spoke about the beaching operations conducted by HMA LST 3501 at Heard Island in December 1947.

The original idea had been to use pontoons and LCVPs (landing craft) to transfer cargo and stores from the ship to the station to be established ashore. However, the equipment we were carrying proved hopelessly inadequate to the extent that doubts began to arise about the ship's fuel (not to speak of other) supplies. Accordingly, George Dixon, our deeply admired Captain, took a decision to beach the ship herself on the shore near the site of the station and to unload cargo and stores there directly through the bow doors. This was a hazardous operation, given the rocky nature of the shoreline at that point, plus violent changes of the weather during which we could work only, on respect of shore operations, one day in three. Few, if any of us, would have wished to undertake such a risky venture without having such a man as George in charge. Sure enough he achieved his objective and unloading proceeded apace, including in particular the landing of the bulldozer, which was of course essential to the success of the operation.

My own role in the beaching operation (as it had been in other LSTs in which I had served) was to supervise the stern anchor, which was dropped during the final landing approach. The stern anchor's purpose was generally regarded as being to pull the ship off the beach, and it no doubt played a minor role in this. In fact, by far the principal power was provided by the ship's main engines, via the twin propellers. (The danger here, of course, was that the stern anchor's wire could force the propellers as the ship came astern.) Instead of this, the stern anchor's purpose was to maintain the ship's line on to the beach so that the ship did not swing

broadside. At any rate, I had been on the bridge constantly (except for meals and necessary "comfort" periods) for rather more than 36 hours. Unfortunately, my temporary replacement held to the "pulling off" stern anchor theory, and apparently pulled on it with a vengeance, except perhaps when the ship began to move when he may have permitted some slack to develop. As a result, the stern anchor seems to have been pulled in and, sure enough, possibly assisted by slack, the ship swung beam on to the rocks, amidships. Mighty efforts were made to pull her off but to no avail. What was worse was that the barometer was dropping, indicating the imminence of bad weather.

A pause was called for while refreshments were consumed (and, presumably, strength gained) when, suddenly and unexpectedly, the ship began to swing off the rocks on her own account. The wind had changed - for no more than about 30 minutes altogether - and we were free (though with a lot of tidying up to do!) and a full gale then descended on us.

After two or three days of bad weather, we made another attempt. I was once more "boss" of the stern anchor. As per usual, as we approached the shore, George gave the order for the anchor to be let go. Alas, nothing happened. The control equipment had frozen up. So the attempt had to be abandoned. We then had to return to our starting point in order to warm up the equipment and to make another beaching attempt.

As we made our second approach, the (very capable) leading stoker handling the equipment twiddled with it to ensure that this time it would work. It did just that - flying out, off the drum, a full half mile too soon. When I reported this to George, he apparently could hardly believe his ears, then took off his cap and jumped on it. He alleged that I owed him a new one. In any event, the beaching was abandoned for the day (there were plenty of other things to be done, and sufficient stress all round had no doubt been engendered). Later, beaching operations proceeded without a hitch - and truth to tell, I never did provide George with a new cap.

After a few more reminiscences by expeditioners, the raffle was drawn. There were some unusual but interesting prizes. There was a crock of ANARE Club Jubilee port, a V5 video (created and kindly donated by our guest speaker), a V5 T-shirt (donated by Lucinda), FDCs and stamp packs postmarked Davis and Casey (donated by Catherine and Paddy), some Zoo passes and a huge box of Presidential Chocolates created by Lucinda. Lucky winners included Peter McGregor (who was unable to attend at the last minute due to hip problems) and Sue Ellyard.