

SYDNEY MIDWINTER 2010

By David Ellyard

A classy new venue, a substantial and lively crowd with a good representation by younger expeditioners, an excellent guest speaker on an important topic, a varied program that did not flag, plus the legendary efficiency of the Branch committee...all these combined to make the 2010 Sydney Midwinter Dinner one of the best in recent history.

We met on 26 June at The Epping Club, our first visit to the venue and not likely to be our last. The sixty expeditioners and partners present included a pleasing number whose Antarctic service dates from the current century. We proceeded with all due speed through the AGM and elections, securing two new members for our committee from among the younger brigade, Geoff Beer (Casey06) and Bob Paton (Davis09) and the return to office of the hardworking Lucinda Coates. We farewelled two long-serving Committee members, Hilton Swan and Col Christiansen, the latter after some 26 years in harness, which included building up the best club website in the country. Thank you, Hilton and Colin. The rest of the Committee, Phil Silvestro, Owen Holmwood, Margaret Whitelaw and David Ellyard, agreed to go around the dance floor one more time. We then gathered on the stairs for the mass photo-opportunity.

Once we sat down to eat, long-serving MC David Ellyard again grabbed the microphone. Formalities began with a welcome from President Phil Silvestro and moved onto the *Toast to ANARE* and the *Toast to the Expeditioners*. The first was proposed by the MC and responded to by the senior expeditioner in the room, John Seaton. He recalled some of his experiences with the RAAF flight in Mawson in 1956. The Toast to the Expeditioners was proposed by our most recent returnee, Bob Paton, with the response provided by the legendary Graeme "Chompers" Currie, whose almost uncountable trips south began in 1960 and covered much of the next 40 years. As our most "seasoned" expeditioner, he was the obvious choice.

The cover of our program featured a portrait of Phil Law, and a tribute to the lately-departed PGL was prominent in our evening. This was led by Bill Burch who showed some historic footage of the transfer of the American IGY base at Wilkes to Australian control. The nearly 50 year-old movie showed a sprightly Phil in the camouflage wind-proofs we all wore back then, and we heard his distinctive voice. Our thanks to Bill for making that available. When the MC took the microphone to the room we heard a few anecdotes, some more creditable to Phil than others.

We also recalled another recent loss, that of Shelagh Robinson, our much loved "Mrs Rob". She had served as welfare officer in the Division from the mid 1960s, and so was well-known to many expeditioners of that time, and later edited *Aurora*. She had been a regular visitor to our MWDs over many years, regularly donating one of her own artworks as a raffle prize. Indeed, as her son Angus

recalled, those donations stimulated the establishment of our raffle, which over the last 20 years has raised nearly \$10 000 to support our sponsorship of the seal and sea-lion research program at Taronga Zoo.

Our guest speaker was Dr Tas van Ommen, from the glaciology program at the Division and an expert on the use of information from ice cores to investigate the ancient climate of Antarctica. A fluent and knowledgeable speaker, he gave a fascinating illustrated talk on this exciting science, with its many implications for climate today and into the future. At Law Dome near Casey, where most of the Australian drilling has taken place, the ice cores down to bedrock take us back 90 000 years in records of temperature and atmospheric gases, but elsewhere in Antarctica the data runs back nearly a million years.

Tas was able to link the recent increase in snowfall around Law Dome with the ongoing 50 year drought in SW Western Australia. In answer to a question, he said that the loss of ozone over Antarctica in recent decades has caused changes in the circulating winds which had shielded Eastern Antarctica from the worse effects of global warming. It is in Western Antarctica around the peninsula that the collapse of ice shelves is most advanced.

As the Division's representative, Tas also answered questions about more general matters, including the future of the bases. He said the AAD remained committed to keeping all four bases open. The air-link (he had previously showed some great footage of a landing at the Wilkins airstrip) would continue to be a great support for scientific work, allowing short stays by researchers. There seems little chance of the term ANARE returning to the lexicon of the Division; even the use of the existing mottos and motifs is being severely curtailed.

We wound up a memorable evening with the *Call of the Years*, which we do by decades nowadays. More than 50 years of Antarctic experience was on display around the room which was a cause for celebration. Let us hope that we always have a couple of generations on hand, keeping alive and handing on the spirit ANARE of which we are all so proud.