

Sydney Midwinter 2013

The Epping club was again the venue of the New South Wales Branch, 2013 midwinter dinner, with an almost full house of 92 expeditioners and their guests. As is our tradition, the group photograph was first on the agenda, making use of the 'penguin shuffle', as tightly packed, well-dressed bodies gradually moved further and further down the stairs, until everyone could fit in the frame, shown above.

Then, the usual toasts; first, was to ANARE, proposed by master of ceremonies, David Ellyard, and responded to by John Seaton, Royal Australian Air Force (M56) John recalled assisting scientists in the field to attain destinations they never dreamt of.

The toasts to the expeditioners was proposed by ANARE icon Bill Storer (Q51 M54), later the last man standing in the 'call of the years'. He recalled the many 'hard yards'. The response was from the most recently returned expeditioner on hand, Bob Rowland (C12/13). He is not a 'newbie' with experience dating back to 1983 at Mawson. So he greeted the men of M83, who were on hand having a 30 year reunion.

Later in the night, we heard from M83 Officer in Charge, Tom Arrowsmith. That mob were the last expeditioners to live in the old Mawson dongas, and they commissioned the Red Shed, bringing the first stage in a change in ANARE culture. They also installed and commissioned the first satellite dish for real time communication. Tom said "Life on base is not as intense; that's not necessarily a good thing".

Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) operations manager, Dr Rob Bryson, was the AAD representative. He showed a short video of the 2012-2013 year, which noted, among other things, how an unplanned two weeks with *Aurora Australis* icebound, during the early spring sea ice expedition, Sea Ice Physics and Ecosystem eXperiment (SIPEX), changed the plans for the remainder of the season. This was a good example of the 'A' factor at work, hence the AAD mantra, Adapt, Improve, Overcome.

To raise funds to support the Club's Oral History Project we ran a silent auction for a rare copy of the 1928 proposal by (later) Admiral Richard Byrd, for what became the first United States Antarctic expedition. This raised the astonishing sum of \$1400.00, which was swelled by takings from the usual raffle.

Our guest speaker was well-known television man and self-confessed Antarctic tragic, Andrew Denton. He spent much of the evening yarning with our more experienced Antarctic expeditioners and could hardly believe some of the things he heard ("I met people who were there when Antarctica was formed...")

He has been south as many times as many expeditioners, and to many places with deep links to Antarctic history. In 1992 he put together a documentary about a year at Davis, giving expeditioners hand-held cameras to record their experiences over winter, going down the next summer to pull it all together. This was a winter when there had been genuine tensions between two groups on the base. It was life changing for Andrew, both the trip and the process of trying to piece together the story of the year.

In 1997, he had the opportunity to go down south with travel companies into the Ross Sea, visiting Cape Adare, Ross Island, Hut Point, Cape Royds, the locales from which expeditions set out for the Pole in the heroic age. He recalled the 1911 winter trip by some of Scott's men, to collect emperor penguin eggs, as an epic tale of endurance.

Later again, he made the voyage from Ushuaia in South America to the wild-life rich Antarctic Peninsula, through the mountainous seas of the Drake Passage. A highlight was a visit to South Georgia where, in 1916 Shackleton and his few companions ended their epic small boat trip, following the sinking of *Endurance*. Andrew recalled that when Shackleton walked into the whaling station at Stromness and asked, "Is the war over?" he was told, "No, the world has gone mad".

It was all gripping and personal stuff, well-illustrated and well received.

To wrap the evening, Bill Storer offered some special thanks to two not present: Dick Thompson, without whom Heard Island and Macquarie Island would not have got off the ground (he took over when Phil. Law got seasick); and the legendary, but sadly departed, Lem Macey, without whom Mawson (station) would not have happened.

By David Ellyard