

Canberra Midwinters Dinner - 26 June 2015

Canberra Midwinter's Dinner was held on Friday 26th June, 2015 at the Belconnen Labor Club.

This year's dinner was attended by 64 expeditioners, partners and friends. It was the largest attendance for many years as there were two reunion groups, Davis 1980 and Mawson 1985, with winterers from as far afield as Perth, Tasmania and Queensland.

Once the technical issues associated with getting the audio-visual system working were solved the night's program commenced with the loyal toast proposed by Ian McLeod.

After the entrée the guest speaker, Diana Noyce, gave us an illustrated talk on Crook Cooks. When Douglas Mawson led his 1911-1914 Australasian Antarctic Expedition to Commonwealth Bay there was no dedicated cook in the party, instead each expeditioner was expected to take their turn to cook for the whole group. Most were good cooks but a few continually mucked up by forgetting to add key ingredients.

Diana contrasted Mawson's all-in rostering with Scott's British expedition, which was run on the naval standard of having an officer's and a separate other rank's mess, and with Amundsen's successful polar push of the same era. Amundsen used his experience from his North Pole quests to ensure his attempt at reaching the South Pole would not be hampered by poor victualling. For example his plan included killing his dogs to supplement the other rations as his expedition made its dash for the pole.

Scott's polar push was hampered by the decision at the last moment to include a fifth participant but only take rations for four. Although they reached the pole only a month behind Amundsen they all perished on the return leg.

Similarly Mawson's expedition in the summer of 1912 resulted in the deaths of his two companions Mertz and Ninnis. They also slaughtered their dogs but did not realize that eating the livers caused vitamin A poisoning.

Mawson took sufficient supplies for two years including livestock which were slaughtered and dressed on arrival at Commonwealth Bay to provide as diverse a variety of foods as possible. One amusing common problem was the thawing of the tins of vegetables. The tins were placed in the oven to heat them up but quite a few exploded spreading their contents all around the hut. His party also instituted the celebration of the various special occasions like birthdays, religious festivals and, in between, any other appropriate event. Of course Midwinter was one such occasion.

The special DVD produced by Antarctic Division was played before the main course came out. The Division's staff are to be congratulated on producing an excellent presentation of the feature programs of the last summer season, prefaced by a foreword from out-going Director Tony Fleming.

After the main course ANARE Club President Joe Johnson spoke in particular of the club's achievements in the past year and its future.

Next was a slide show presentation by Paul Lytwyn of highlights of the 1985 wintering party's time at Mawson followed by a recollection by senior Met man Dave Pottage from the official diary of the trips out to Kioa Emperor Penguin rookery to count the penguins there for the annual census for the biology program.

Tim Brown of the Davis 1980 wintering party recalled the highlights of their year, including their memorable Toga party, the revelry at the midwinter dinner, and a visit from the Ruskies.

After dessert the years were called, the attendee first to go down being Tony Hall who commanded the DUKWs in 1953/54 and in 1954/55. Surprisingly no one was in attendance from the last ten years of voyages.

Another feature of the evening was the launch of Bob Tingey's self-published book of his Antarctic experiences as BMR's lead Geologist titled 'Frozen Footsteps'.

The evening finished with coffee and the last stragglers left around 11:30 pm.