

SYDNEY MIDWINTER 2014

Saturday 27 June 2015 at the Epping Club

We kicked off at 1800 with the traditional homers, followed by the AGM. The old committee was re-elected (though new blood would be welcome). We spend quite a while discussing why the numbers were so low (only 34 this year) and what we might do about it. The Committee was given some ideas to work on. The party then removed to the stairs for the traditional group photo.

When the meal got underway, David Ellyard as MC proposed the Toast to ANARE. In reply the legendary Dick Thompson noted that ANARE is now 68 years old (he had been there at the time). He shared some yarns from his long-ago adventures, the first ship he travelled South on (in 1949), was the Totten; build during WWII, Norwegian, converted to a sealer, had a German U-boat engine; weighed in at 541 tonnes, the size of a Manly ferry, certainly not an ice breaker.

Murray Doyle, Master of the AA, was the most recently returned from down South and so was chosen to propose the Toast to the Expeditioners, Grahame Budd (the earliest expeditioner other than Dick) responded. He opened with an old Scotch quote his grandfather used to say: "Here's to us! There's none like us! Damn the others". Despite the changes in technology, Antarctica remains an exciting place to work, even though getting there is safer.

Our guest speaker was Professor Chris Turney, earth scientist, communicator and explorer. Inspired by the events of Mawson's AAE expedition in 1912, he led an enterprise in 2013-14 to retrace the route of that journey. The aim was to see what measurements have changed in 100 years. Much was achieved, even though their ship became ice-bound for a time, with the AA coming to the rescue.

One of those measurements that have changed is the Adelie penguin count at Commonwealth Bay; 200,000 in Mawson's day but only 5,000 on a recount in 2013-14. The Adelie colony is dying out due to changing ice conditions. The commute for fishing is now longer.

Chris noted that Government science funding is dropping. One response is to engage the public to help fund research. Before the advent of the AAD that is how Antarctic research was paid for, by exciting the public. Mawson raised the equivalent (in today's terms) of \$20 million in one year from private sources (with the help of Ernest Shackleton).

They excited the public by using the latest technology such as aeroplanes. They showed the first movies. The first documentary anywhere in the world was that memorable footage of Katabatic winds at Commonwealth Bay. The images of two bent-over figures hacking out ice in the driving wind made Antarctica real for people.

And real science was carried out by the expedition and by Shackleton's. Chris related that one of the projects he is involved with, the Hindcast Project, is using the daily weather observations Shackleton's crew made. In order to get people excited again, Chris is looking into some of those great old stories.

Following the pattern of recent Sydney Midwinter Dinners, we took the Call of the Years by decade, starting from the most recent:

2010s: a few people stood including Murray Doyle (whose previous season included rescuing our guest speaker) and Margaret Whitelaw, who had carried Phil and Nell Law's ashes for burial on the West Arm at Mawson on her club Berth trip.

In the 2000s Chris was looking at heat records in 2010 and, in 2002, was at McMurdo with the Americans looking at mountain uplift. Bill Burch visited the mainland stations on his Club Berth in 2008; Owen Holmwood also went on the Club Berth trip in 2010.

About seven expeditioners stood to mark the 1990s. Being on NSW Council and being selected as the Club Berth representative was a common theme, as was pointed out to members by Lucinda.

For the 1980: four stood. Bill Breeze passed on greeting from Rowen Butler in Nepal, who reports that whilst Kathmandu has moved some 30cm due to the earthquakes. Mt Everest has moved just 3cm.

Big group for the 1970s: eight returnees.

For the 1960s; 6 stood, including David Ellyard and John Rankins (M66) who mentioned the Mawson 1966 50th reunion to be held at next year's MWD. Graham Budd recalled the first ascent of Big Ben on Heard Island, which almost wiped out the ascending party.

When we reached the 1950s, Dick Thompson yarned about experiences during his AAD tenure of 1949-50 to 1959-60, including being a surveyor's labourer in Enderby Land in 1958 and some more about the 541 tonne Totten, whose safe working load of 3 tonnes precluded it from lifting a DUKW. Dick had to learn explosives in order to assist the Totten through the ice.

Clive Jewell spoke of his experiences in South Georgia over three years from 1951-53, being "shanghaied" there he never got "polarizaed".

1940s: "Last man standing" was Dick Thompson; his first trip South had been in 1949.

No raffle this year, but the Silent Auction prize of a print of the Nella Dan called Requiem for a Little Red Ship was secured by Damien Macey

Lucinda Coates