



CLUB JOURNAL

AURORA



MIDWINTER 2020



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear members

I hope you had an enjoyable mid-winter, despite what COVID19 has done to our traditional celebrations.

I recently had a very pleasant and informative online chat with Kim Ellis, the Director of the Antarctic Division. The following is a summary of the issues we discussed.

The Director gave me an outline of the challenges facing the Division from the current worldwide pandemic, and its effects on operations. The AAD implemented an action plan two to three weeks ahead of the Federal government, preventing transmission of COVID19 to any of our bases.

The pandemic remains a major issue. It will influence decisions as to who is allowed. An age restriction is currently being considered. This would have a large impact to operations if implemented.

The commissioning of the new icebreaker *RSV Nuyina* has been delayed by travel restrictions on personnel and equipment. As a result, *MPV Everest* has been hired for the 2021 summer season resupplies.

This development, along with possible restrictions for who goes on voyages, has led the Division to withhold offering the Club a berth on a round-trip voyage in the coming season, though he acknowledges the benefits in continuing the "Club berth" when possible.

I raised the issue of Antarctic memorabilia. Finding a home for the Club's holdings and individual member collections is a significant issue that we are currently dealing with. The Director agreed it was important not to lose the history but commented that Division too is facing the challenge of storage of the significant amounts of such materials it holds.

He went on to say that Division operations are likely to change in the next few years. This would see the Division review the storage areas it has for such items. That review may provide an opportunity for the Club to assist in identifying significant items and what to do with them. It appears unlikely the Division will offer to store any Club-held items until a permanent home is found.

I gave an overview of the Club's planned activities. I also asked him to pass on our thanks to AAD Librarian Tess Egan for her valuable support of our activities, such as the recent commemorative events and **Aurora**. The Director said he would be glad to do that and is happy to continue providing this type of interaction. He supports a strong linkage between the Division and the Club.

I gave him an overview of the Club's progress in updating our web page and mentioned our willingness to provide a opportunity for current expeditioners to use the Club as a support structure. The Director said that would be beneficial to both parties and would like to hear how we might achieve it. A key role for the Division is to provide well-being support for expeditioners. He felt that the Club could well be suited to provide some of that.

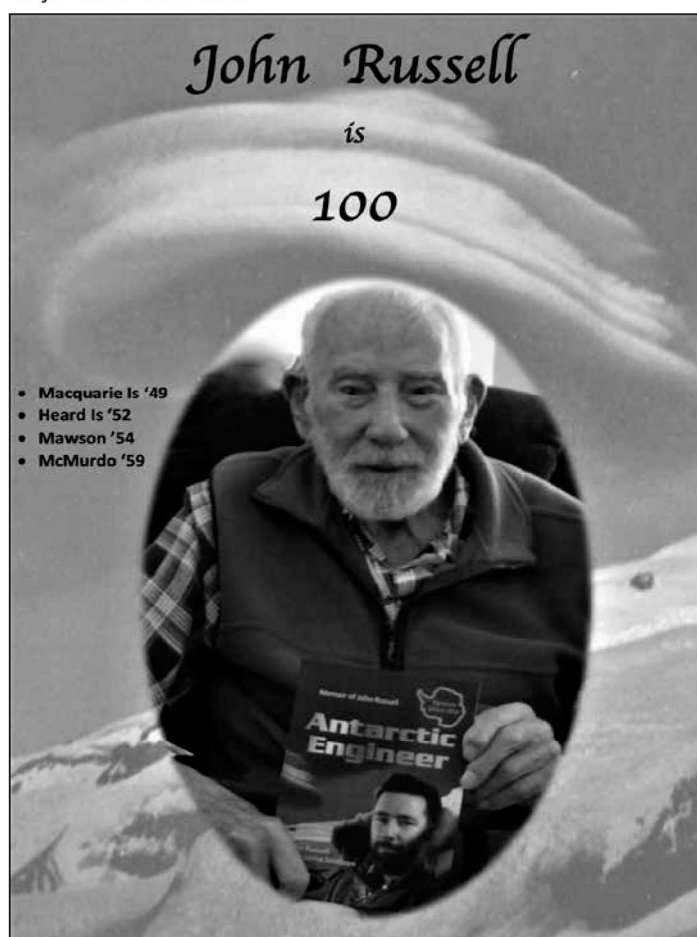
Richard Unwin

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING.....

John Russell turns 100

ANARE icon and Mawson 1954 pioneer John Russell very recently celebrated his 100th birthday. This eyewitness account of his party is by Dale Jacobsen, co-author of John's biography Antarctic Engineer.

It wasn't the party that had been planned. Covid-19 put paid to that, but if you've waited 100 years, you are going to celebrate anyway. An intimate event, organised by John Russell's daughter, Sue Morgan, and Peter Jones, President of the Deception Bay sub-branch of the RSL, launched this Antarctic legend into his next century. John arrived, wearing his Antarctic hat and Polar Medal, to cheers from his family and close friends. His son-in-law Keith and six grandchildren had applied for special consideration to be able to come from New South Wales to join the festivities.



Peter Jones presented John with letters and certificates from those who "represent the people", starting with the local member for Bancroft, Chris Whiting MP, and working his way up the "food chain": Hon Luke Howarth MP, Federal Member for Petrie; Councillor Peter Flannery, Mayor of Moreton Bay Regional Council; Anastacia

Palaszczuk, Premier of Queensland; His Excellency The Honourable Paul de Jersey AC, Governor of Queensland; Scott Morrison, Prime Minister of Australia; General David Hurley, Governor-General of Australia; all the way to the top, congratulations from the Queen, at which point John commented, "She won't be very long after me".

Other messages of congratulation came from John's Antarctic colleagues: from Kim Ellis, Director of the Australian Antarctic Division, and from a number of members of the ANARE Club: Richard Unwin, President; David Dodd, Treasurer; Liz Parer Cook, Vice President, and David Parer. David Dodd and Brian Harvey, another member of the National Council, had arranged for a plaque which Trevor Luff, National Secretary, presented to John.



For the most part, John was happy to sit in his wheel chair and let others do the talking. But given a chance, he was not short of something to say. For a man entering his second hundred years, he is remarkably sharp. He got on a roll when recalling the beginning of WW2 and how the troops had to find their way from Cowra to Darwin, but the MC had to interrupt to do the presentations. Later John talked about having typhoid fever during the war, which delayed his being able to go south. But he certainly knew what he was there for. He pointed proudly to his Polar Medal and said, "I was presented with this for going down to Mawson."

At the end of the formal presentations Trevor and Peter Field (Web Manager for the ANARE Club) symbolically flew the ANARE Club flag over John. Next year, on 22 October, will mark 70 years since the flag was first unfurled. When John stood beneath the flag in 1951, he had already spent the winter of 1949 on Macquarie Island and had been selected as expedition engineer for the 1952 winter on Heard Island. In 1954, he returned south to help establish Mawson, the first mainland base. John is

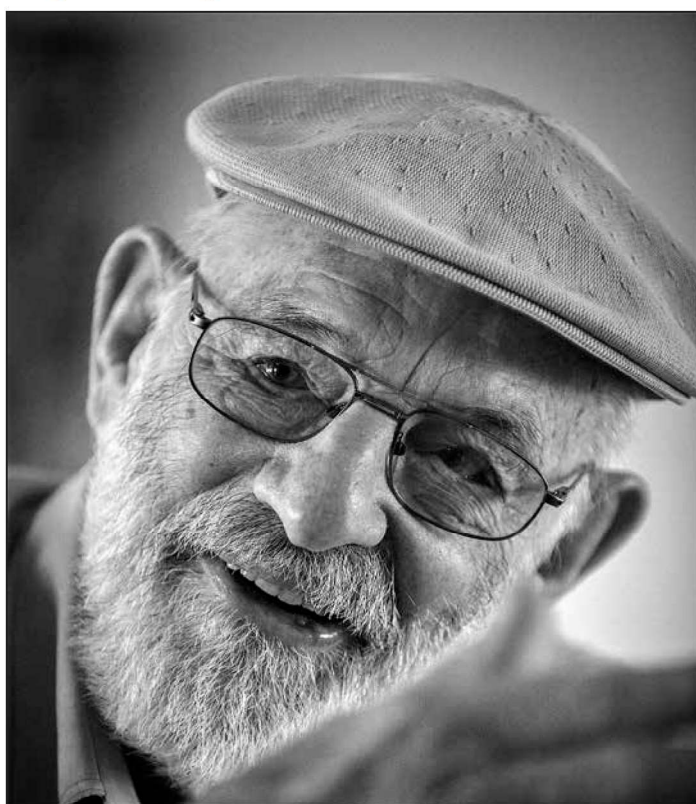
the last surviving member of the 10-man team who first landed in Horseshoe Harbour. That service had gained him the Polar Medal in 1956.



John under the ANARE flag with Trevor Luff

During his address to the party goers, Trevor Luff spoke of his five-year project to record John's life and adventures. This had resulted in the publication of *Antarctic Engineer*.

Syd Kirkby awarded Phil Law Medal



Pioneering Antarctic surveyor **Syd Kirkby** is this year's Phillip Law Medalist. The award was announced on Midwinter's Day by ANARE Club President Richard

Unwin. The Medal was established by the Club in memory of our founder and long-time patron Dr Phillip Garth Law and recognises an Australian who has made an outstanding contribution to Antarctic affairs and the Antarctic community.

The citation for the award reads as follows;

Sydney Lorrimar Kirkby AO MBE
In recognition of his Outstanding
Contribution to Antarctic Affairs and the Antarctic
Community, particularly for his Leadership and
Achievement in the field of Exploration, Surveying,
and Mapping of Australian Antarctic Territory.

The Medal and the printed citation will be presented to Syd at the Annual General Meeting of the Club in Brisbane on 15 August.

The following appreciation of Syd's contribution is taken from the AAD website.

A quiz question might well ask: 'Who has explored and surveyed the most Australian territory?' The answer is not Burke and Wills, or another famous Australian explorer. It is Sydney 'Syd' Kirkby; a pioneer surveyor who served in the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE). Kirkby personally surveyed more Antarctic territory than any other explorer, including Scott, Shackleton and Mawson.

In 1956, during Kirkby's first year in Antarctica wintering at Mawson station, surveyors were beginning to develop the technique of using daylight stars to make an astro-fix from rocky features in Antarctica – essential for accurate mapping. Before this, it had been standard practice to use only sun sights, which gave rise to many problems in Antarctic conditions. At the time, surveying was heavy work often involving rock climbing on peaks carrying heavy packs laden with equipment.

In what was a pioneering journey, on his first expedition Kirkby was part of a three man party to survey the Prince Charles Mountains with dog sledge teams. In 1960, his party undertook a remarkable 400km sledging traverse through Enderby Land from the Napier Mountains to Mawson station. He participated in coastal exploration and surveying traverses in the summers of 1961–62, 1962–63 and 1964–65, mapping an extraordinary amount of Antarctic territory.

By 1964, the astro-fix had largely been replaced by electronic distance measuring. However, it was still necessary for surveyors to reach the pinnacle of the peak carrying batteries, theodolite and other essential gear. The 'hardest and longest' climb of Kirkby's career was on Leckie Range in early 1965. He had to hang off the peak with a rope around his waist to sight his theodolite. During the six-hour climb, a rope broke causing him to fall nine metres with a 40kg pack. Although injuring his back and neck, he continued the climb and finished the work. Later, he went on to climb Leckie Range a further three times.

Several Antarctic features bear his name: Mount Kirkby,

Kirkby Glacier, Kirkby Shoal and Kirkby Head. Awarded an MBE for services in Antarctica, he also received the Polar Medal in 1957.

Seizing all the Antarctic pioneering opportunities available to him, Kirkby has marvelled at his good fortune:

We'd climb a mountain peak and look out and say: 'Wow! In all time, certainly no human being and probably no creature has ever seen it.' It's a funny feeling, It's not a possessive feeling, it's a privileged sort of feeling — 'How did I get this lucky?'

About the Phillip Law Medal

The Medal was created by the ANARE Club in 2011, following the death of "Phil" Law. The recipient is judged by the Club to have made an outstanding contribution in fields such as, but not restricted to, science, technology, leadership, administration, environmental management, the promotion of tourism, or the raising of public awareness, to the extent as those activities are relevant to Antarctica.

This year marks the tenth presentation of the Law Medal. Previous awardees have been

2019 Dr John Manning: for achievement in Antarctic surveying and mapping, including through "deep field" expeditions to the Prince Charles Mountains.

2018 Dr Patricia Selkirk: for increasing understanding of Antarctic biology and ecology, especially on Macquarie Island.

2017 Dave McCormack: for preservation of Antarctic heritage and environment through leadership of cleanup and recovery operations.

2016 Professor Pat Quilty: for leadership in Antarctic science over two decades, including as Chief Scientist at the Antarctic Division.

2015 Dr Des Lugg: for service as Head of Polar Medicine at the AAD for 31 years, and for increasing understanding of the impacts of isolation on human health.

2014 Andrew Jackson: for 31 years service at the Antarctic Division, particularly as regards the operation and maintenance of the Antarctic Treaty System.

2013 Dr Ian Allison: for increasing understanding of the Antarctic ice environment through research in glaciology, and for leadership in international Antarctic science.

2012 David Parer and Elizabeth Parer Cook: for increasing public awareness of Antarctica through film-making

2011 Dr Martin Riddle: for achievement in the understanding of remediation of human impacts on the Antarctic environment.

MIDWINTER BY ZOOM

The idea came to me while I was having virtual Friday drinks with some old army mates. Since with COVID restrictions we couldn't have our regular Mid-Winter celebrations in our various cities, why not ask if we can join in the celebrations at the Antarctic stations and extend this to our Club members, maybe offer them a toast while having a quiet drink and a chat.

After a few formal enquiries, we received acknowledgement from the three continental stations. I set about organising the format and sent out email invitations to our Club members, asking for their interest. The response was excellent with many people jumping at the opportunity to talk with people standing where we once stood. We even had "Stay" conferenced in on all the calls.

At any one time over about two hours we had 20 to 25 people Zoomed-in, though some came and went. They included some intrepids from further away than Antarctica: Les Denham from Houston, Texas (at 0330 in the small hours, he was smartly dressed in his suit) and Richard Eyre, logging in from London at about 1030 Sunday morning.

Each session was MC'ed by an alumnus of the relevant base. As you can see from their reports below, we had mixed success in drawing in those now Down There, but the exercise was dubbed a great success and it has opened our eyes to what is now possible. I am sure it won't be the last such effort and we will get better at it.

Peter Field, Webmaster.

1730 AEST - Mawson – S/L Matthew Williams

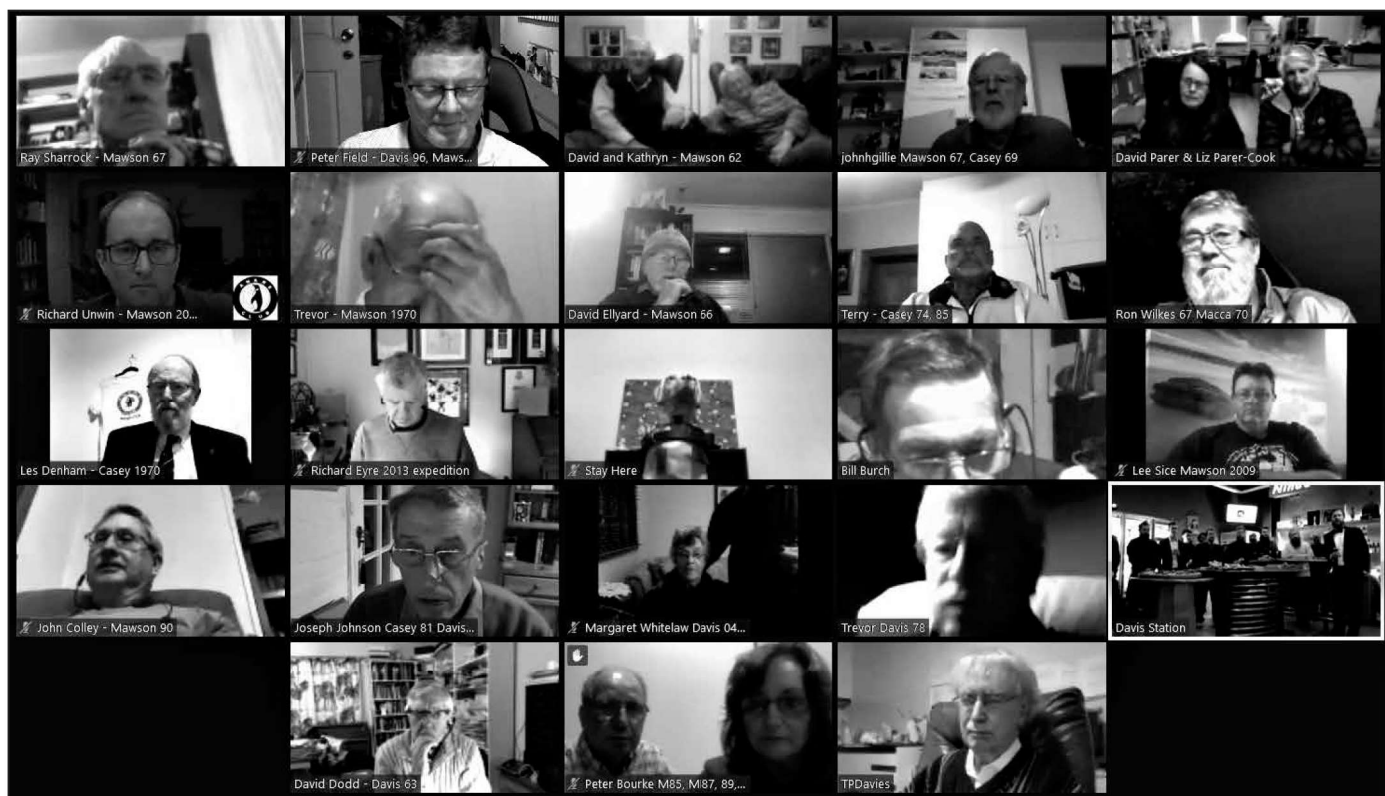
The first hook-up attempted was with the 66th Mawson ANARE. But despite numerous attempts by Peter Field to make Zoom contact with the OIC, Matt Williams, it was to no avail.

So, with about 20 former expeditioners on Zoom, we reminisced about our favourite memories from Down South. George Cresswell and Harry Munstermann (1960) talked of the deep impression the year made on them, and in particular their experiences in the field. Dave Carstens (1962) recalled his survey traverse on the Amery Ice shelf. David Ellyard (1966) relived the doubt they all felt as to whether they would be relieved; the Nella Dan, coming to take them home, was icebound for a month (this goes with Ron Hann's story from Casey Ed.)

From 1967, there were 3 representatives; John Gillies, John Illingworth and Ray Sharrock told us of the trials they had with the doctor, necessitating requiring in tele-medicine via Davis. Trevor Luff (1970) showed a photo of two D5s slotted at the same time on the way to Mt Cresswell. Later years were represented by Peter Bourke and Alison Clifton, who between them had many trips south and a heap of yarns.

Richard Eyre clocked in from the UK and talked of his memorable 2013 trip to the South Pole with former injured British soldiers, one without legs. More recent Mawson-ites included John Colley (1990), Peter Field & Richard Unwin (2002), who were down there when the wind generators were put up, and Lee Sice (2009). It was a great way to share Midwinter's Day in these times of COVID 19.

David Parer



1830 AEST - Casey – S/L Allison Dean

Our attempt to contact Casey was more successful than for Mawson, but we still managed one-way traffic only. S/L Allison could hear and see us, but we could see only a stilted image of her and heard nothing intelligible. We still drank their health and wished them a good Midwinter.

So we just chatted and reminisced among ourselves about our days at Wilkes/Casey 1/Casey 2. Bill Burch (Willkes1961) recounted the tragic story of the American *Neptune* aircraft which crashed on take-off, killing five of the nine-man crew. Bill had been filming the take-off and was first on the scene to assist the badly burnt survivors.

Ron Hann (Wilkes 1967) recalled the *Thala Dan* (headed to Wilkes) being stuck in the pack ice near Wilkes for two weeks, while sister ship *Nella Dan* (going to Mawson) was ice-bound nearby for four weeks. They had to wait until the US Coast Guard icebreaker *Eastwind* arrived to free them.

Ian Sutherland (Casey 1997 S/L) remembered the many weeks on short power rations when the main powerhouse broke down, the result of a series of faults. The larger of the two standby generators would not start (and took 120 days to fix). The station had to operate on the small output of the second standby generator.

Ron Hann

1930 AEST - Davis – S/L David Knoff

At 1930, it was time to try a call to Davis. In contrast to earlier attempts, we managed a good connection with Davis and had a good chat with S/L David Knoff. As can be seen in the screenshot on the previous page (right hand end of second bottom line), the Davis people were dressed-up in their glad rags, ready to go to dinner. Back here about 20 other ANARE Club members, now with more Davis alumni, were on-line, including Stay the Dog and Allison Bourke's cat.

We heard that Davis has been experiencing more snow than usual, with the thick cover making sea-ice travel on quads difficult. S/L David remarked that they have two helicopters on station, 'winterized' in preparation for the summer. They are still awaiting news of how and when they will RTA at the end of the year. Joe Johnson remarked that his group had a similar experience in 1998 when the *Aurora* fire made resupply and relief problematic.

After those Down South went into dinner, the rest of us stayed on to chat. Several members spoke of their experiences playing darts and chess over the "wireless" with other stations in the early days, others recounted the building program. Theo Davies and Margaret Whitelaw discussed their work on the science programs, Margaret working on shells and Theo on air-glow physics. David Dodd reminisced about very early balloon flights and other meteorological challenges of the early 1960s.

Toasts were drunk to Davis, to the Club and to all fellow expeditioners, past and present.

Joe Johnston

THE WAY IT WAS

A COOK'S TOUR

By Bernie Sorensen (Cook M82, Q84, M86, C89/90, *Aurora Australis* 1990 to 1993)

Having experienced a couple of days of cooking in the galleys on the *Nanok S* and *Lady Franklin*, I considered applying for a cook's position in the merchant navy. I discussed this idea with Chris Stuki, Casey 1988 cook. Our applications were successful. We attended the Maritime College in Launceston and were trained in marine safety drills, fire-fighting and lifeboat drills.

We then attended the roster at the Shipping Office in Melbourne to be allocated to a vessel which required a cook. Following a few short reliefs, I picked up work on the *Zappa Arctic*, an oil rig in Bass Strait. I worked from 6pm to 6am baking bread, cakes and desserts.



**Bernie the Baker on the *Zappa Arctic* 1989
(Bernie Sorensen)**

I had only been on the rig for a week or so when, late one night, I received a phone call from Mick Doleman in the Sydney office. "Would you be interested in joining the *Aurora Australis*". I couldn't believe my ears. The ship had only been launched. I was flown to Newcastle and met up with the other members of the crew. Chris Stuki made up the numbers. We were addressed by officials and told that if any of us was not prepared to put in a 150 percent effort, we should drop out now.

The maiden voyage of the *Aurora Australis* was a marine

science cruise to Heard Island and surrounds. During this voyage, Mid-Winter Dinner was celebrated with much enthusiasm.



**The Chef in the the Mawson kitchen 1986
(Bernie Sorensen)**

Later the AA sailed from Hobart to the Mawson ice edge where expeditioners were flown into the station, along with some fresh fruit and vegetables. Once that was completed, the captain set a course for Davis Station and once again expeditioners were flown into the station by the helicopters. The vessel returned to Hobart to take on stores for each station's re-supply. By this time the sea ice had broken out, allowing the vessel to tie up closer to the station.

One season we were honoured with the presence of a few politicians on a round trip. They set up court in the mess. Many of us were hopeful of some really rough seas to welcome these gentlemen. Alas, the sea was like a mill pond, down and back.

Life on board had its moments in rough seas. On one occasion, we cooks were setting up for the evening meal. I was carving a leg of pork, Chris and Dave were setting out the vegetables, the sweets, cold meats and salads for dinner. The ship started to roll badly. The three of us were grimly hanging onto utensils full of food, when suddenly the basket from the potato peeler came flying through the air, straight for me. I turned and caught it, only to see my leg of pork take off and land in the big pot of custard. There we were, washing custard off the pork and Dave straining the pork out of the custard. There was plenty of

laughter outside the galley, but very little inside.

At the end of the 1990/91 Antarctic season, Chris Stuki was paid off and Bill Robinson, who had wintered at Casey in 1984, took his place. Alan White, who had wintered at Casey in 1983, Macquarie in 1985 and Mawson in 1987, joined the AA a bit later. On my final voyage in 1992, the dog teams from Mawson were loaded onto the ship for RTA. This marked the end of the dog era. It was so sad.



**The dogs leaving Mawson on the AA 1992/93
(Bernie Sorensen)**

I was having some thoughts about working in warmer climates. I felt I needed a change. I was spending all my summers in Antarctica and all my winters in Hobart. I resigned early in January 1993. My next vessel, the *Osco Star*, was a Shell tanker which sailed to places such as Singapore, Fiji, New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and all round the Australian coastline.

FROM THE EDITOR

Readers of the last issue of **Aurora** who received their copies by mail will have been disappointed to see the damage done to the great image of the *Aurora Australis* on the front cover.

This was caused by a fault at the mailing house. For many years, this journal has been packed for mailing by a willing team of ANARE veterans who form the *Packing Shed* crew. Under the current corona virus restrictions, that group has been unable to meet. Hence the need for the use of a mailinghouse. This issue has required the same.

In recompense, we are glad to include with this issue a reprint of the cover of the last issue. You can use it as a wrap-round to hide the damage, or to replace the cover entirely if, like many members, you bind your copies of **Aurora**.

YIKLA

**David Ellyard: Mawson 1966, Club Berth 2003,
Commonwealth Bay AAE Centenary 2012**