

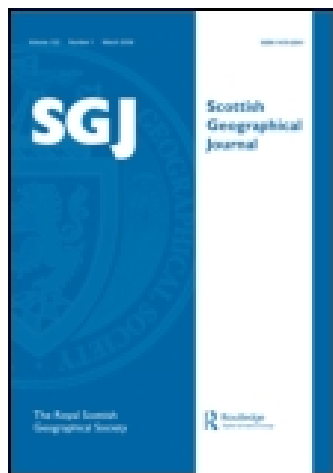
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### The Australasian Antarctic Expedition: A review

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great war. One has only to think of the terrible distress endured in Lancashire at the time of the Civil War in America from 1861-1865. But never before has so large a part of the world been affected in this way. In proof of that it is perhaps enough to point out that it was deemed necessary, not only by most of the belligerent countries but also by the Argentine, Brazil, Bulgaria, Denmark, Norway, Italy, and Sweden, to proclaim a moratorium immediately after the outbreak of war. Hence there is an almost world-wide feeling that this war is not merely a clashing of the interests of the belligerents, but that it is an injury to the whole world, and of this idea I know of no more significant indication than that which occurs in the reply of President Wilson to an appeal made to him by the German Emperor. In that reply he says: "A day of settlement will come, when I am convinced that the nations of Europe will unite to end their differences. Whoever has been in the wrong will learn the sequel, and the responsibility will fall on the guilty." This is not the place to decide where that guilt lies, but the idea that guilt is somewhere attached to the outbreak of this war is distinctly expressed. If by any possibility any wholesome fruit can grow from the development of this idea, then perhaps we may say that this deplorable war has not been waged altogether in vain.

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## THE AUSTRALASIAN ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION<sup>1</sup>: A REVIEW.

(*With Illustrations.*)

IN two large volumes Sir Douglas Mawson has told the story of the first Australasian Antarctic Expedition. This expedition followed the example of the *Belgica* and the *Scotia* in making scientific exploration its foremost aim, and in having no ambition to reach the Pole. It needs no small amount of courage and perseverance to appeal to the public for funds with a programme of that nature, and Sir Douglas Mawson had some difficulty in raising the necessary funds. But Australia responded more liberally than the home country has ever done for comparable ventures, with the result that in December 1911 the expedition was ready to sail from Hobart.

Mawson was fortunate in his scientific staff, nearly all young graduates of Australian universities, but most of all was he to be congratulated on securing the services of Captain J. K. Davis. As captain of Sir E. H. Shackleton's *Nimrod*, Davis was a man of proved capacity when he undertook the far more difficult task of navigating the *Aurora* to the uncharted shores of Antarctica south of Australia. Much of the success of Mawson's expedition was due to Davis' able handling of the ship and his splendid ice navigation. It was Davis also who was responsible for

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<sup>1</sup> *The Home of the Blizzard: Being the Story of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-14.* By Sir Douglas Mawson, D.Sc., B.E. Illustrated in colour and black and white, also with maps. 2 vols. London: William Heinemann, 1915. Price 36s. net. (The blocks of the accompanying illustrations have been kindly lent to us by the publishers. —Ed. S.G.M.)

the valuable oceanographical work done between Australia and Antarctica, researches which were carried out in almost completely unknown seas and in most adverse weather conditions. To this era of polar research Captain Davis is what Captain T. Robertson was to the last—a brilliant ice-master with that instinctive understanding of the ways of ice which comes to comparatively few men. It is to be hoped that his skill and knowledge will be utilised on future polar expeditions.

Mawson chose that part of Antarctica loosely termed Wilkes Land, of which nothing was known since the discoveries of Wilkes and of Dumont d'Urville in 1840. D'Urville had landed on Adelie Land, but Wilkes had not set foot on the continent, and his vague accounts had left uncertain the exact position of the continental coasts. The original idea of Mawson was to form three bases at intervals along this coast, but circumstances caused him to change this plan in favour of two bases, 1500 miles apart, with eighteen and eight men at each respectively. The main base, under Mawson's personal command, was at Commonwealth Bay in Adelie Land. The other, under Mr. F. Wild, who had served both in Scott's and Shackleton's expeditions, was on the Shackleton Ice Shelf about 160 miles east of Drygalski's Gaussberg. Neither situation was particularly favourable, but they were the best that could be found on this unapproachable and stormy coast. Wild's party, indeed, wintered not on the land, but on an ice shelf which, for all they knew, might carry them out to sea before the ship returned. However, it was a question of landing there or returning to Australia. For in the end of February the ship could delay no longer in that part of the Antarctic with any chance of escape. About seventeen miles to the south of this station were the rising slopes of the ice-covered land.

At the two bases research in meteorology, magnetism, and biology was carried on, and exploration conducted to east and west by sledge journeys. A party from the main base also reached the south magnetic pole. Between the two bases Captain Davis explored with the ship. The result of all these explorations, extending from 89° E. to 132° E., has been to remove several names from the map and to add others. The *Aurora* sailed south of Balleny's Sabrina Land and saw no trace of it. This land, therefore, as well as all the land reported by Wilkes, except Knox Land, have been erased from the map by Mawson. Knox Land, he admits, may exist, but pack prevented an approach. In this case he argues quite rightly that a sounding of 300 fathoms indicated the probability of land within sixty miles, the distance the *Aurora* was from the position of the land given by Wilkes. On the other hand, the *Aurora* got a sounding of 340 fathoms within seven miles of Totten High Land of Wilkes, but failed to see it in clear weather: Mawson therefore removed the name from the map. Now 340 fathoms surely indicates land not far to the south, and even if Wilkes' landfall is not exactly where he placed it, we question the justice of wiping out his discovery altogether and obliterating his name. Budd's High Land and North Land should still appear on the chart, for the *Aurora* failed to get near them on account of heavy pack. The *Challenger* in 1874 had questioned Termination Land, and the *Aurora* found its site occupied by Termination

Ice Tongue. The use of Wilkes' name in this case perpetuates his work. Had his latitudes been right Wilkes could not have seen Queen Mary Land 150 miles south of this. But we cannot help feeling that some allowance must be made for small inaccuracies of latitude and longitude, and the spirit of the explorer's work recognised even if the letter is wrong. Mistakes in position are easy to make in polar regions, and were none the less liable to occur nearly a century ago. In this respect Ross suffered from injustice in the case of his Parry Mountains and his



Walking against a strong wind.

discovery of what was later called Edward Land. Mawson has given Wilkes' name to a strip of coast land immediately west of Adelie Land, which at least commemorates that American explorer, but it seems a little unfair to wipe out all Wilkes' names. Some of his landfalls have certainly not been disproved in the positions he gave.

George Land (a brief and more convenient version of George V. Land) will certainly link up with Oates Land on the east, while Wild's discoveries linked Queen Mary Land to Wilhelm Land. The abundance of "Lands" along this coast will prove tedious if the outline is charted and named piecemeal. The old use of Wilkes Land for all this coastline was convenient, though perhaps not strictly accurate, and it is doubtful whether in practice the name will be employed in the restricted sense in which Mawson uses it. The "High Land" sighted from the *Gauss* in 1902 was found to be an island, and was suitably named after Drygalski.

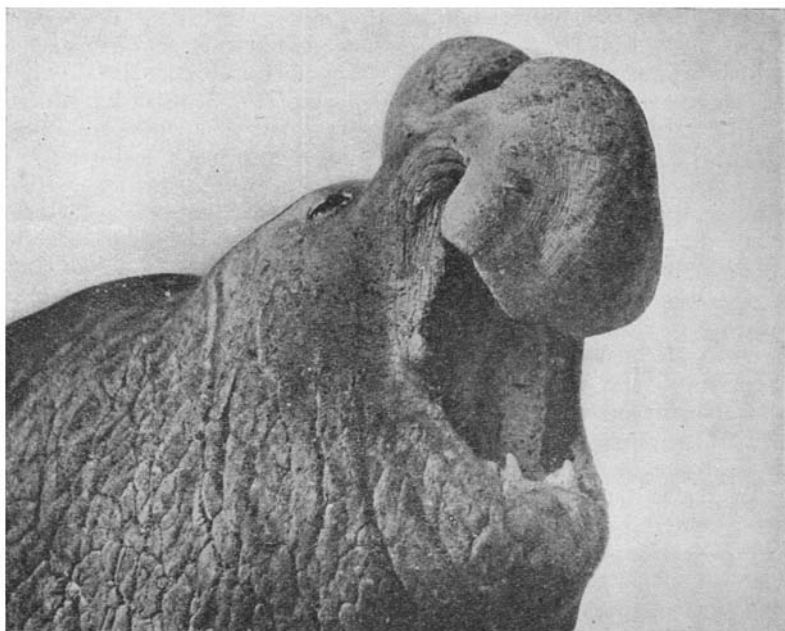
This coast is much encumbered with pack ice, which is rather curious in view of the persistent south-easterly winds. In places these cause habitually ice-free seas: D'Urville Sea off Adelie Land, and Davis Sea off Queen Mary Land. But these are each in the lee of more or less permanent obstacles of ice—in the latter case the Shackleton Ice Shelf, and in the former a “barrier” of pack ice off George Land, which may be held by islets or by bergs grounded in shoal water. The cause of the blockage in this case is not clear. We would have liked to have read Captain Davis' opinion regarding the feasibility of exploring these coasts from a ship rather than by land journeys, and whether he considers there may be a strip of open coastal water behind the pack further to the west towards Enderby Land.

We notice that Dr. W. S. Bruce's name has been attached to a small but marked rise in the floor of the ocean off Termination Ice Tongue “in recognition of the oceanographical work of the Scottish Expedition in Antarctic Seas.” We are glad to see this, but would have welcomed Dr. Bruce's name attached to some more conspicuous feature. The Australasian Expedition owed so much to him in the loan of oceanographical equipment and advice as to its use that it is no exaggeration to say that without his help there would have been few results in oceanography.

This was the first Antarctic expedition to employ wireless telegraphy. The base was linked up with Australia *via* the expedition's subsidiary station at Macquarie Island. The high winds of Adelie Land destroyed the masts several times, but otherwise the installation was successful and many messages passed. In summer the continuous daylight lessened the range and cut off communication.

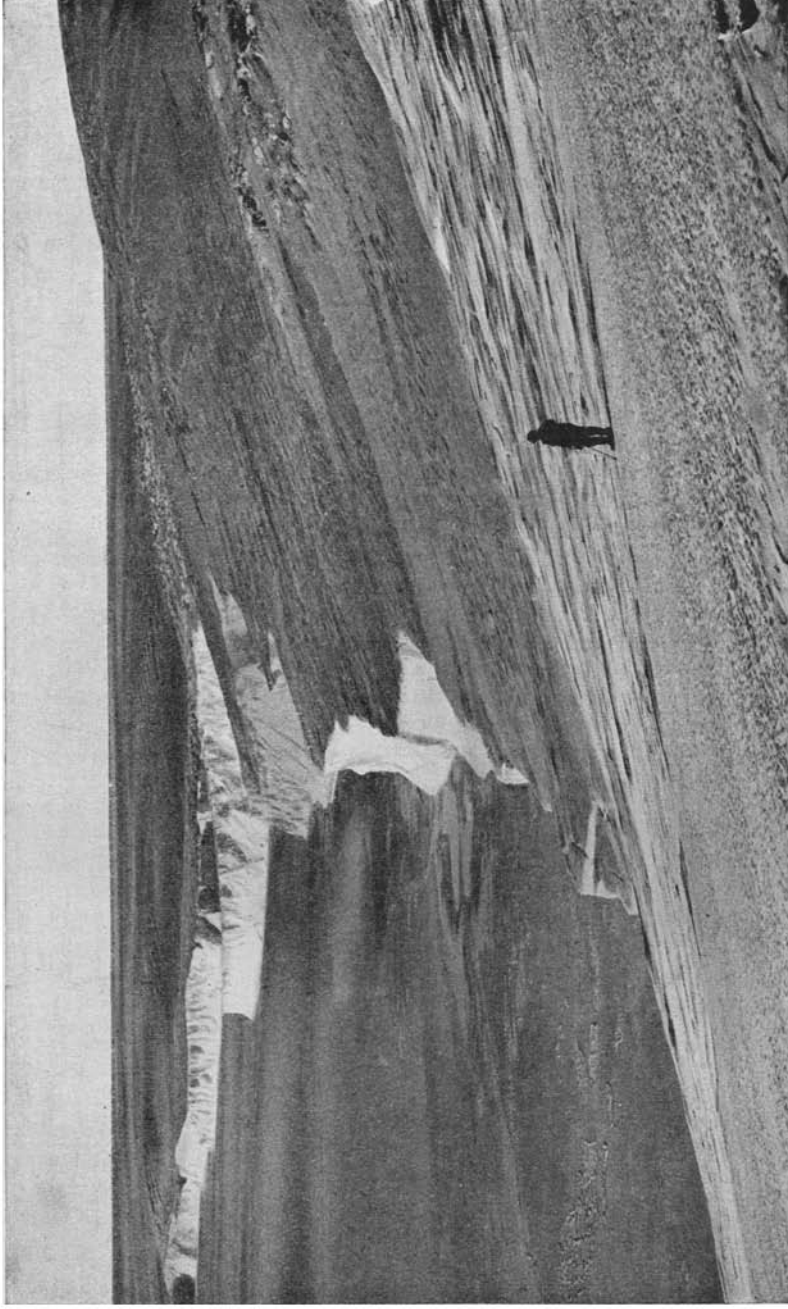
The volumes abound with adventure in every chapter. The wintering of the western party on the Shackleton Ice Shelf was in itself a daring undertaking: fortunately the party met with no accident. But Sir Douglas Mawson had the misfortune to lose his two companions, Lieutenant B. E. S. Ninnis, Royal Fusiliers, and Dr. X. Mertz, one after the other, on his great eastern sledge journey. Lieutenant Ninnis fell down a crevasse with one sledge and a dog team. Mawson and Mertz, finding themselves with one and a half week's provisions and six dogs, were compelled to turn back, 315 miles from the base. By eating the dogs and going on reduced rations they managed to get along. Three and a half weeks later Mertz succumbed. Mawson was left alone with 100 miles to traverse and barely any food. The record of that lonely march is stirring reading and eloquent of the perseverance and endurance of the man: there was little hope, only the will to live kept him going. Once he fell into a deep crevasse and hung on the end of the sledge rope fourteen feet below the surface. By a great effort he reached a knot on the rope, and laboriously climbed up. As he reached the top a further section of the snow edge gave way, and once more he was hanging at the end of the rope. “Below was a black chasm; it would be but the work of a moment to slip from the harness, then all the pain and toil would be over. It was a rare situation, a rare temptation—a chance to quit small things for great—to pass from the petty exploration

of a planet to vaster worlds beyond. But there was all eternity for the last, and, at its longest, the present would be but short." Slowly he gained the surface, and was safe—from that danger; but starvation was drawing near. There were other narrow escapes, but he plodded on. Luckily, the weather was not as bad as usual, or Mawson's story would never have been written. At length, by a stroke of rare good fortune, he came across a food depot which the search party had left only six hours before. He was saved. But bad weather delayed him, and he reached the hut in time to see the *Aurora* leaving for the west to fetch Wild and his party. She had waited nearly four anxious



The head of a bull sea-elephant photographed in the act of roaring.

weeks, and could delay no longer if she was to make certain of relieving Wild. Mawson recalled the *Aurora* by wireless, but the weather prevented Captain Davis' return. Should he wait for an improvement in the weather—it might be many days—or should he steam westward to relieve Wild's party? Davis had, in fact, to decide which party was to be abandoned, Mawson's or Wild's. Wireless communication failed. On him alone fell the burden of this decision. It was not an enviable position. Davis has said it was the worst hour in his life, but he made up his mind, and steamed westward to Wild. Mawson's party, at least, was safe and well-provisioned. Wild's party might be in grave peril—even then it was late enough for a ship to reach their station. "Determination, fearless and swift, was necessary; and, in coming to his momentous decision, Captain Davis acted well and for the best



Where the plateau descends to Commonwealth Bay.

interests of the expedition." Wild's party was found and brought back to Australia. In the summer of 1913 Captain Davis was in London working hard to secure more funds for the expedition. Once more he returned to the Antarctic, and in February 1914 the whole expedition was back in Australia with a fine record of successful work behind it.

It is too early yet to estimate all the results of Mawson's expedition, but we may expect them to be of the first importance, since his field of work was previously untouched, and his object throughout was research. At any rate, we know that the lands explored are a continuation of the plateau of Victoria Land. The geological details will be awaited with interest. Most striking, perhaps, are the meteorological results, especially as regards winds.

The persistent strong winds in Adelie Land give it claim to be considered the windiest place on earth—at least at sea-level. "We have found an accursed country," writes Mawson, nor could any one regard it otherwise when the average wind velocity for the year was 50 miles an hour. The average for July 1913 was 63·6, and for eight consecutive hours one day in that month it blew at an average of 107 miles an hour. These terrible winds were accompanied by drift. "Picture drift so dense that daylight comes through dully, though, maybe, the sun shines in a cloudless sky; the drift is hurled, screaming through space at 100 miles an hour and the temperature is below 0° F. You have then the bare, rough facts concerning the worst blizzards of Adelie Land. The actual experience of them is another thing."

The many biological discoveries include a large rookery of Emperor penguins at Haswell Island, Queen Mary Land, and the first discovery of the eggs of the Antarctic petrel.

Several delightful chapters are devoted to the life and work of the subsidiary post on Macquarie Island.

The book is a fascinating one, well worthy to stand among the classics of Antarctic exploration, but in no ungenerous spirit we would suggest that curtailment would not have lessened its interest. A general account of the Antarctic regions in the first chapter, though brief, will be useful to the reader, and is an excellent innovation in this type of book. The three maps (in a pocket) are clear and good, while the larger illustrations are beyond all praise. A number of colour photographs are included. Some are distinctly good, but others fail to express the true shades.

R. N. RUDMOSE BROWN.