



Discussion Paper for an Antarctic Tourism Co-operative and Antarctic Cultural and Heritage Centre for Hobart

1. Our Antarctic History

Hobart's connection to the Southern Ocean and Antarctica is easily understood by a short glance at a good map. The port city is one of the closest points to the Antarctic continent, especially for those exploring the vast reaches of East Antarctica, from the French territory of Adelie Land to the Weddell Sea. Even before the city was founded in 1804, pioneering navigators including Abel Tasman (1642), Tobias Furneaux (1773), James Cook (1777) William Bligh (1788) and Bruny D'Entrecasteaux (1792) had called in to re-supply and take on water after their chilling adventures in the heaving ice and thick mists of the Southern Ocean.

It was a ready transition to Tasmania's first real industry, founded by ships and sailors well used to these frigid waters – British and American whalers in pursuit of the 'right' whales they had effectively wiped out in the Northern Hemisphere. The trade was cruel, dirty and dangerous but enormous profits were made by exporting whale oil to the world. The remnants of the whaling industry – try pots, warehouse gantries and gravestones - are still easily found along the Hobart waterfront.

By 1839, the port of Hobart was a bustling enterprise, with dozens of ship's captains, provedores, chandlers and sailmakers providing the necessary skills and supplies to maintain a thriving industry. It made sense then, for the British Captain James Clark Ross to launch his Antarctic expedition in that year, with the ships HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, from the port of Hobart. The French explorer Dumont d'Urville set off from Hobart in the same year to claim Adelie Land for France. Thus began a long history of Antarctic exploration from the capital city of Tasmania.

In 1898, the Norwegian-Australian explorer Carsten Borchgrevink (who was one of the first humans to set foot on the Antarctic continent) arrived in Hobart to take on supplies and a Tasmanian physicist named Louis Bernacchi, for his Southern Cross Expedition to Antarctica. A set of statues near Hobart's Victoria Dock commemorates the first Tasmanian Antarctic expeditioner. Borchgrevnik's achievements included the furthest venture south (78 degrees S) and the first party to over-winter on the Antarctic continent. His accomplishments, however, were sniffed at by the British scientific establishment, who were much more interested in the planned Antarctic expedition led by the Royal Navy officer Robert Falcon Scott.





Scott's British National Antarctic Expedition of 1901 was widely publicised, and Scott eventually returned a hero. It is notable that Hobart was the port of call for two rescue ships, the *Morning* and the *Terra Nova*, sent when Scott's own ship, the *Discovery*, was helplessly trapped in pack ice for almost two years. Scott's third officer on this expedition was the Anglo-Irishman Ernest Shackleton.



Scott led a second Antarctic expedition in 1910, the notorious *Terra Nova* expedition, which cost Scott and four of his fellow expeditioners their lives. They perished on the return journey from the South Pole, dismayed by the fact that the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen had reached it five weeks earlier and planted the Norwegian flag.

Scott and his party were still missing in Antarctica when Amundsen returned to Hobart in March 1912, where he was temporarily shunned by Hadley's Hotel (which now boasts a suite named after the Norwegian). He called into the General Post Office to send a cable to the King of Norway, then announced to the world through the popular press, that he had reached the South Pole. The news was heard around the world and Amundsen was an instant celebrity. He remained in Hobart for another two weeks. A plaque set in the pavement outside the Hobart General Post Office, and a commanding statue of Amundsen at Princes Wharf, commemorate this important moment in Norwegian and Antarctic history.

Australia's proud record of Antarctic exploration began with the Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911. Led by a South Australian geologist named Douglas Mawson, the expedition planned to explore and map the part of East Antarctica directly south of Australia. After a farewell luncheon at Hadley's Hotel, the party boarded the steam yacht *Aurora* to great fanfare and crowds of well-wishers on the Hobart waterfront, setting off on December 2, 1911. They would reach the Antarctic shore at Commonwealth Bay on January 8, 1912. Mawson and his party, which included photographer Frank Hurley, established a base there with a set of pre-fabricated buildings including the Main Hut, which they erected in ten days while off-loading equipment and supplies for at least a year on the ice. The original huts still stand today at Cape Denison, as Australia's most remote heritage site, cared for by the Australian Antarctic Division and the Mawson's Huts Foundation. A replica of the Main Hut stands on the Hobart waterfront, reproducing in fine detail the working and living conditions of these early explorers.



Two world wars would bring a halt to this 'heroic age' of Antarctic exploration, but many advances were made between the wars and in the years immediately after WW2. Mawson would return to Antarctica with the BANZARE Expedition in 1929 – 1931. Australia expanded its involvement in Antarctic science with the opening of permanent research stations on Macquarie Island (1948) and on the Antarctic continent (Mawson 1954 and Davis 1957. In 1959 Australia also took over Wilkes which had been established by the United States.)

In 1961, Australia was one of twelve founding signatories of the Antarctic Treaty System, a remarkable international agreement that determined to preserve Antarctica for peaceful research and science. That treaty still exists today, having weathered the political storms and battles of the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the rise of China as a world power.

By the 1980s, the tide would turn towards Hobart as Australia's leading Antarctic port. The Australian Antarctic Division moved from Melbourne to Tasmania in 1980. The Secretariat of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) opened in 1982 and the CSIRO Marine Science labs arrived in 1985. The French Antarctic Program moved its base of operations to Hobart in 1988, making it the home port for its ship *l'Astrolabe*. The iconic Australian icebreaker *Aurora Australis* came into service in 1989 and made Hobart its home, becoming a familiar sight for a generation of Tasmanian school children and their parents. Ten years later, in 1999, the list of



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Tasmanian engineering firms, provedores, technical services and scientific organisations supporting Antarctic operations had grown so long that the Tasmanian Polar Network was formed. This central agency made it possible for the national Antarctic programs of many nations to access world-class logistical support and supply in what had become Australia's Antarctic city.

With the opening of the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre (ACE-CRC) in 1991, the foundation of the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) in 2009 (which took over from the Institute of Antarctic and Southern Ocean Studies established in 1988) and the hosting of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in 2012, Hobart had come of age as a major international centre of excellence in Antarctic and Southern Ocean science and research. The city is now home to more Antarctic scientists and engineers than anywhere else on earth.



Hobart's essential role in Antarctic operations continues to expand. With the lengthening of the runway at the Hobart International Airport, our capacity to handle intercontinental flights to East Antarctica (and by connection, to the rest of the continent) is enhanced. As well as providing essential supplies, personnel transport and emergency response capability, the airport is also playing a leading role in the development of Antarctic tourism via over-flights operated by private companies. Effectively, Hobart controls air access to the enormous Australian Antarctic Territory – a national claim to stewardship of 42% of the Antarctic continent, all of it administered from Tasmania's capital city.

2. Antarctic Tourism in Hobart

Aside from the highly professional scientific and logistical establishment that supports Antarctic endeavour in Hobart, there is an enduring fascination, among the general public, with the last great wilderness on earth. It is understandable: Antarctica is a place of extraordinary natural beauty, dynamic life and remarkable complexity. Visitors to Tasmania are often eager to learn more about it, and our own Tasmanian community, closely connected to the Antarctic is just as keen to understand it better. We can measure this by the number of people visiting the galleries, museums and public events that have Antarctica as their theme.

These include:

- 'Islands to Ice' exhibition at the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery (TMAG)
- Antarctic maritime history displays at the Maritime Museum of Tasmania
- Mawson's Huts Replica Museum
- The Australian Antarctic Festival
- The Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) museum at Kingston
- The sub-Antarctic Plant House at the Botanic Gardens

Historically, there have been numerous Antarctic activations in Hobart. The Antarctic Midwinter Festivals (2002 – 2010) were supported by State Government (through Antarctic Tasmania) to enliven the 'dead season' in Tasmania's winter months. The festivals included street parades, a film festival, photographic exhibitions and practical displays by the AAD, as well as ship tours of the *Aurora Australis*. The series culminated in the Antarctic Centennial Year (2011-2012) celebrating the centenary of Roald Amundsen's achievement at the South Pole and Mawson's important Australasian Antarctic Expedition, which led directly to Australia's claim to 42% of the Antarctic continent. An Antarctic Flotilla in the River Derwent, a re-enactment of Amundsen's return to Hobart at the GPO and a Huskies' Picnic in the Botanical Gardens brought Antarctica to the Tasmanian public to great acclaim.

MAWSON'S HUTS FOUNDATION



A commercial enterprise, supported in part by the Tasmanian Government, opened a visitor attraction called Antarctic Adventure in Salamanca Square around this time. This entertainment complex offered a cold room, Antarctic maps and inter-active exhibits to a paying audience. Saddled with high capital investment, poor attendance figures and some questionable management choices, Antarctic Adventure folded after just a few years, leaving a bad taste in the mouth of the Tasmanian Government and significant losses. This result was to 'poison the well' for years afterwards with regard to investment in Antarctic tourism infrastructure.

In contrast, the Islands to Ice Exhibition at TMAG, with more rigorous scientific and historical content and some excellent examples of contemporary museum curation, opened in 2006 and continues to be a major attraction to this day, free to the public and often visited by Tasmanian school children, learning about what lies 'just over the horizon' in Antarctica.

In December 2013, the Mawson's Hut Replica Museum opened on a waterfront site provided by the City of Hobart and funded by a \$350,000 grant from the Commonwealth Government. This was a success from the first – an authentic full size replica of Douglas Mawson's 1911 expedition base furnished with detailed memorabilia of the era, which gives the visitor a remarkable insight into the life and work of Australia's early Antarctic pioneers. Voted #1 museum in Hobart on the influential TripAdvisor travel site and garnering two awards in the Tasmanian Tourism Awards, the museum attracts a large percentage of interstate visitors, in particular cruise ship visitors during the season (now sadly interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic)



In 2016, the Mawson's Huts Foundation, with the financial assistance of Events Tasmania, the City of Hobart and Sydney-based Antarctic travel specialists Chimu Adventures and with support from the Australian Wooden Boat Festival, launched the Australian Antarctic Festival in Hobart. The four-day program included ship tours for school groups and the general public, an Antarctic Exhibition in

Princes Wharf One, a film festival, photography exhibition at TMAG, lectures, a live husky sled run across Franklin Wharf and a concert of Mawson's Music at the Hobart Town Hall. The festival was produced a second time in 2018, achieving higher visitor numbers and a significant increase in the percentage of interstate visitors making the effort to come to Hobart for the event. The festival added a second ship, the CSIRO's *Investigator*, to the tour program and



expanded to include lively participation from IMAS and the Tasmania Polar Network.

Plans to present the Australia Antarctic Festival again in 2020 were well advanced when the COVID-19 disaster struck, making it impossible to produce an event that relies on open borders to attract interstate visitors, confined spaces aboard Antarctic ships and large numbers of people closely packed on the Hobart waterfront.

3. The Way Forward

The public fascination with Antarctica is not going away. Antarctic cruise operators have announced plans to operate tourist expeditions from Hobart as soon as conditions allow. (Orion Adventures operated such cruises from 2005, before access to Commonwealth Bay was blocked for years by an enormous iceberg). Attendance numbers for the Australian Antarctic Festival and the Mawson's Hut Replica Museum were steadily increasing until the current pandemic fractured that chart. A new initiative, the Frank Hurley Photography Awards, has already captured international interest and will be presented in a major exhibition at TMAG later this year. Tourism potential for visitation to Macquarie Island (already part of the Tasmanian polity) and to Heard Island (Australia's only active volcano, located in the remote Southern Ocean) is real, and achievable.

To ensure short-term recovery for our Tasmanian tourism industry and longer term establishment of Antarctic tourism as a major drawcard for Hobart, it is essential that we plan now, during the enforced hiatus the COVID-19 pandemic has laid upon us.

To make our already-strong Tasmanian brand even stronger, it would be a mistake to ignore Antarctic themes as a long-lived and deeply genuine attraction for thousands of Australians and international visitors. Here in Hobart, visitors can learn the history, explore the science, see the ships and meet the people who actually work in and study that fascinating continent just seven days over the horizon by ship or a mere five hours by aircraft.

It provides a unique opportunity to promote and development Hobart's rich Antarctic heritage and history as a major tourist attraction.

Adventure cruises and Antarctic overflights are the top end of this market, but for thousands more visitors and for Tasmanians themselves, our Antarctic museums, exhibitions, festivals and events are powerful attractors still hardly developed in local, interstate and international markets.

With the re-development of the former rail yards site at Macquarie Point, we have a once-off opportunity to build a new Antarctic Cultural and Heritage Centre, where these multiple threads can be drawn together to weave a powerful resource: real science conducted by the Australian Antarctic Division



and the CSIRO; visible industry supporting Antarctic operations with engineering, fuel and supplies and a rich cultural element that draws upon 200 years of Antarctic history and a community deeply connected to the Antarctic and the Southern Ocean. The Antarctic Centre might also include an Antarctic Library and Research Centre, modelled on the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, UK, which is the world's foremost repository of polar knowledge in the Northern Hemisphere. Hobart could easily become a leading centre for Antarctic scholarship and research in the Southern Hemisphere.

The involvement of other Hobart-based cultural organisations including the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) and the Maritime Museum of Tasmania would open up rich potential for cultural, arts and heritage appreciation and interpretation.

The Mawson's Huts Foundation proposes a cooperative Antarctic tourism organisation, modelled on scientific organisations such as the ACE-CRC and the industry example set by the Tasmanian Polar Network.

4. Goals

- Reserve space at Macquarie Point to accommodate an Antarctic Cultural and Heritage Centre
- Promote the full or partial relocation of AAD and CSIRO to the area
- Relocate the Mawson's Hut Replica Museum to the Antarctic Centre
- Establish an Australian Antarctic Museum, ship-based or land-based
- Develop the Antarctic Centre as a major Tasmanian tourism, educational and interpretive drawcard.
- Establish an Antarctic Library and Research Centre at Macquarie Point
- Involve TMAG, MONA and the Maritime Museum of Tasmania in curation and interpretation of our Antarctic heritage

David Jensen AM
Chairman

July 31 2020



Dr Phillip Garth Law, AC, CBE was a pioneer of the modern era of Australian Antarctic exploration. He was director of the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) from 1949 to 1966. He founded the Antarctic bases at Mawson, Davis and Casey.



"I am still pursuing the idea of (a) museum which is quite independent of the idea of having a ship. It is terribly important that we have a repository in which we can store all the artefacts and memorabilia of Australia's Antarctic work. The work we did in the early years is already history. It's over 60 years ago. Vehicles have disappeared, aircraft have disappeared. All sorts of artefacts that we used are no longer used. They are historical mementos. They're irreplaceable. There are also sorts of diaries and personal effects that men have that should be promised to a museum when they die. Otherwise they will just be lost or distributed around the country.

"Quite a lot of our important memorabilia has gone to New Zealand for the Antarctic Museum in Christchurch or the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge. So it's essential that if Australia is to have some sort of Antarctic heritage that we do set up an institute of some sort.

"I hope that decision is made before I die because I have access to so many things that other people wouldn't know about. I'd like to... use my knowledge, to drag into the museum all those things from around the world that I know exist and could get."

(Dr. Phillip Law died on February 28, 2010 without realising his dream. The above is an extract from Ian Toohill's book "Phillip Garth Law: His Extraordinary Life and Times")