



Sir Douglas Mawson (1882—1958) - Australia's greatest polar explorer!

The iconic image of Douglas Mawson features on Australia's one hundred dollar note and with good reason!

- Mawson led the first Australasian Antarctic Expedition to carry out geographical exploration and scientific studies, mapping huge swathes of uncharted territory, covering its geology, biology, marine science and meteorology.
- He was the first to climb the summit of Mount Erebus and to trek to the South Magnetic Pole.
- His work on geomagnetism helped pinpoint the exact location of the South Magnetic Pole (at the time on land) and laid the groundwork for modern geophysicists to follow the movement of the Magnetic Pole.
- He shipped the first aeroplane down to Antarctica.
- He designed and built the huts at Cape Denison—the “windiest place on Earth”
- He survived a thousand kilometre trek in which both of his two companions, Xavier Mertz and Belgrave Ninnis, tragically died.
- The Royal Geographical Society awarded him their Founder's Gold Medal and in 1916 the American Geographical Society awarded him the David Livingstone Centenary Medal.
- His last expedition, from 1929-31, cemented claims for a massive 42% slice of Antarctica for the Commonwealth. This was later transferred from Britain to Australia hence becoming the Australian Antarctic Territory.
- He played a major role in the establishment of the Antarctic Treaty which is the most successful world treaty of all time promoting international cooperation and scientific research in the Antarctic.



Born	5 May 1882 Shipley, West Yorkshire, England
Died	14 October 1958 (aged 76) Brighton, South Australia
Nationality	Australian
Education	Bachelor of Engineering. Fort Street Model School and University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales
Occupation	Geologist, Lecturer, Antarctic explorer, Author.
Spouse	Francisca Paquita Delprat (married 1914)
Children	Patricia (born 1915), Jessica (born 1917)
Antarctic Expeditions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1907 – 1909 Shackleton's “Nimrod” expedition • 1911 – 1914 Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) • 1929 - 1931 British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expeditions. (BANZARE) 	



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The lure of Antarctica

Shackleton's 1906 –1909 expedition.

In 1905 Mawson was lecturer in Mineralogy and Petrology at the University of Adelaide. He became interested in the glacial geology of South Australia. When (Sir) Ernest Shackleton, leader of the British Antarctic Expedition, visited Adelaide in 1907, Mawson approached him about travelling on the *Nimrod* to Antarctica to examine the icecap, glaciation and its geological consequences. Shackleton was interested and Mawson was appointed Physicist for the duration of the expedition.

In March 1908 Mawson was one of the first party to climb Mount Erebus. Next summer E. David, A. F. Mackay and Mawson were the first to reach the vicinity of the South Magnetic Pole, manhauling their sledges 2028 km. Mawson was responsible for the magnetic observations and the excellent cartographic work. Sir Edgeworth David said of Mawson: "Mawson was the real leader who was the soul of our expedition to the Magnetic Pole."

Activity:

- Underline all the "Firsts" that Sir Douglas Mawson achieved.
- Find out about the journey of Mawson, Mertz and Ninnis.



SY Aurora skippered by Captain JK Davis | Photo: Frank Hurley



David Mackay and Mawson raise the flag at the Magnetic South Pole on 16 January 1909 | Photo: Frank Hurley



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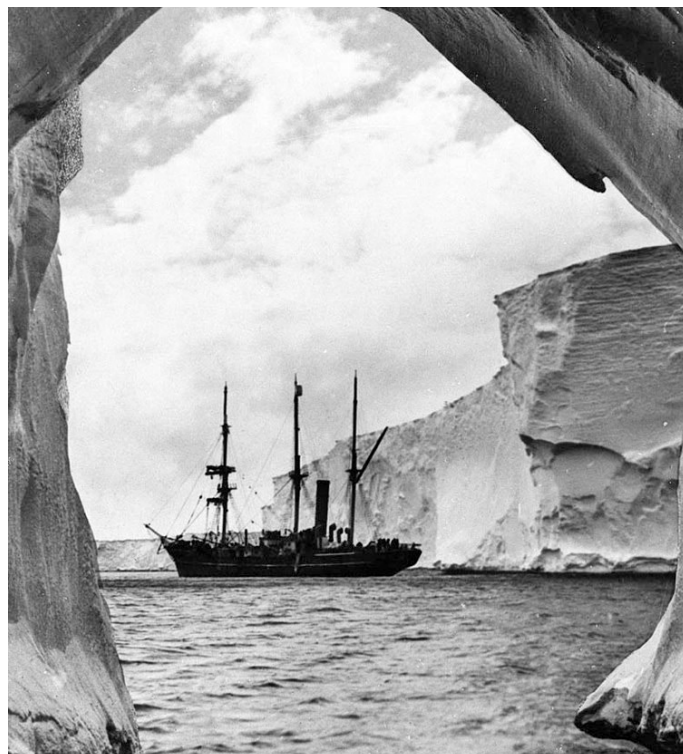
Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) 1911-1914

In 1910 Robert Falcon Scott asked Mawson to join his Terra Nova Expedition. Mawson declined and chose to lead his own expedition to chart the sector of the Antarctic continent immediately south of Australia. It was to be one of Australia's most important scientific expeditions and established Australia's interests in the Antarctic. However, the success was costly as two of Mawson's companions, Ninnis and Mertz, lost their lives on one of the scientific sledding parties.

The expedition, using the ship *SY Aurora* commanded by Captain John King Davis, departed from Hobart on 2 December 1911. There were 31 men on the *Aurora*. Five men were to remain on Macquarie Island the remainder were divided between Mawson's coastal Antarctic bases from which to investigate Antarctica's secrets: Main Base at Cape Denison, Commonwealth Bay, and Western Base at Queen Mary Land.

Cape Denison proved to be unrelentingly windy; the average wind speed for the entire year was about 80 km/h with gusts approaching 300 km/h. They built the main hut on the rocky cape and wintered through nearly constant blizzards. When the men left the safety of the huts it was vital to be wearing crampons that fitted onto the bottom of their boots.

Scientific advances made during the expedition included: work in cartography, geology, meteorology, aurora, geomagnetism, biology and marine science. Biological species on land and sea, never before encountered by man, were described. Meteorological data was collected from all three bases. Geomagnetic field records for 18 months were obtained at Commonwealth Bay.



SY Aurora at the Mertz Glacier | Photo: F. Hurley



Strong winds at Cape Denison | Photo: F. Hurley



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British Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition 1929–1931

Mawson led two more voyages to Antarctica, which carried out scientific observations, mapping and claimed territory for Britain (these claims were later transferred to Australia). The main occupation of the British Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research (BANZARE) expedition was marine science, which included extensive oceanographic work and marine biological sampling. Examination of the various species collected was done over the next fifty years by specialists all over the world. The results were described in the thirteen volumes of the BANZARE Scientific Reports.

Awards and Honours

Sir Douglas Mawson has a long list of awards and recognitions: Polar medals, gold medals of the geographical societies of America, Chicago, Paris and Berlin, the von Mueller medal of ANZAAS and the Verco and Clarke medals of the Royal Societies of South Australia and New South Wales.

He was knighted in 1914. Numerous places have been named after him, such as Mawson Coast and the Australian Antarctic Division's Mawson Station, established in 1954. The Mawson Institute for Antarctic Research was created within the University of Adelaide in 1959.

Mawson's face is well known, having adorned postage stamps and the Australian \$100 note.



SY Aurora at the Mertz Glacier | Photo: F. Hurley



Want to know more?

- <http://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica/history/people/douglas-mawson>