

OBITUARY

SIR DOUGLAS MAWSON, O.B.E., F.R.S.—1888-1958

THE British Glaciological Society has lost one of its most distinguished members by the death of Sir Douglas Mawson on 14 October last. He was born at Bradford, Yorkshire, and emigrated from England to Australia as a boy with his parents. He studied under Sir Edgeworth David at the University of Sydney, and after some glaciological work in the New Hebrides was appointed as a lecturer in mineralogy and petrology at the University of Adelaide.

In 1907 he joined Shackleton's expedition of 1907-09 and thus made his first extensive acquaintance with the Antarctic and its glaciers. He was a member of the first party to climb Mt. Erebus, and of the first party to reach the South Magnetic Dip Pole, in both cases under the leadership of Edgeworth David. Mawson's interest in glaciology was apparently keen, since the expedition narrative relates that after a crevasse bridge collapsed and left him dangling in the chasm on his sledge harness, he secured some interesting ice crystals from the wall of the crevasse and threw them up to his companions for inspection. He produced "A contribution to the study of ice structures" in the scientific reports of this expedition.

His greatest Antarctic work came with the 1912-14 Australian Antarctic Expedition which he organized and led. *The Home of the Blizzard* tells the story of the terrific winds experienced by this party, and of the sledge journey which Mawson alone survived after Ninnis has been lost down a crevasse and Mertz had died from the subsequent hardships. This expedition was notable for its concentration on scientific objectives. It established the first communication by wireless between Antarctica and the outside world, and even at that early date took a partially dismantled aeroplane to the Antarctic to serve as an air driven tractor sledge.

His well-known partnership with Captain J. K. Davis, which started on the 1912-14 expedition, was continued on the "B.A.N.Z.A.R.E." expedition of 1929-31 when for two summer seasons Mawson took a party of British Commonwealth scientists south in Captain Scott's *Discovery*. By avoiding wintering he was able to attract more senior scientists, and the party made notable contributions to physical and biological knowledge of the southern ocean and Antarctic coastline.

Mawson held the chair of geology at Adelaide University from 1920 until his retirement. He made many contributions to the stratigraphy and mineralogy of South Australia and the Broken Hill region, including observations of evidence of very early glaciations of the Australian continent. He did not, however, let his other interests prevent the appearance of full and complete scientific reports of his Antarctic expeditions, with which he steadily persevered in spite of little encouragement or financial support. This task took over thirty years to complete, but the results form both a notable contribution to Antarctic science, and a memorial to his outstanding work.

Mawson's contributions to Antarctic knowledge were marked throughout by a mixture of enterprise, judgment and scientific integrity. His advice on Antarctic problems was still being sought by many, both in Australia and abroad, right up to the time of his death. His spirit is shown by an extract from a recent letter, where, after lamenting some ill health, he wrote: "This is the time when one should have liked to be active in the Far South, instead of immured far from the great I.G.Y. operations." The idea of naming Australia's main scientific base in the Antarctic after him was a most suitable tribute to his lifetime interest.

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