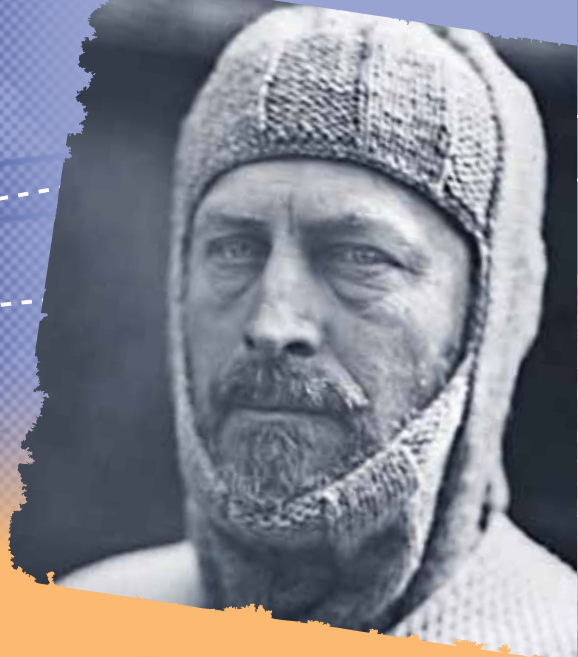


Stories from Australia's History

Douglas Mawson's Antarctic Expedition



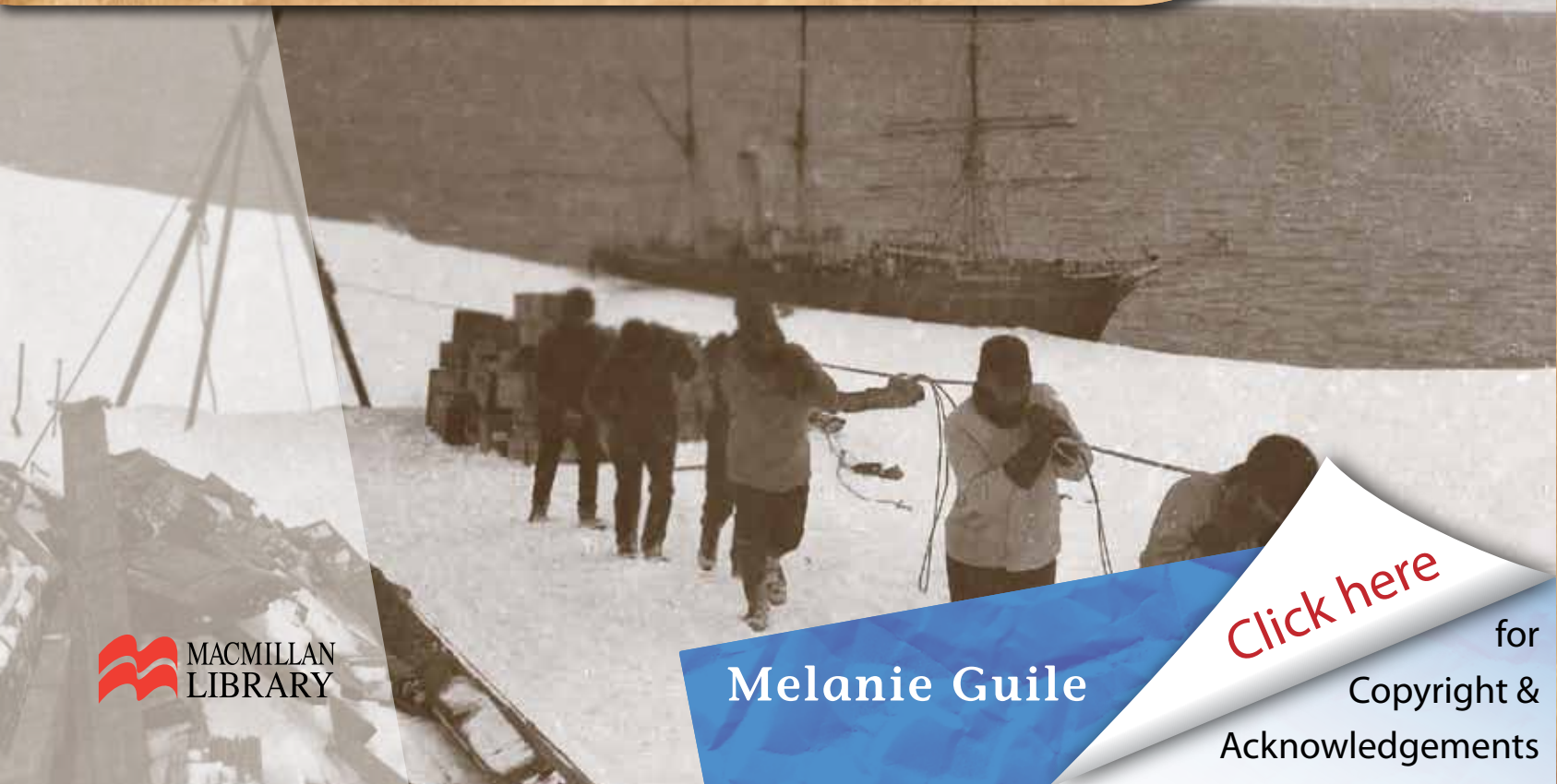
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GRAPHIC
PAGES!

When a word is printed in **bold**, click on it
to find its meaning.

ON THE GRAPHIC PAGES, TEXT WITH
THIS COLOURED BACKGROUND COMES
FROM A HISTORICAL SOURCE.



Stories from Australia's history

The story of modern Australia starts on 26 January 1788. On that day, Captain Arthur Phillip arrived at Sydney Cove from England with the **convict** ships of the First Fleet. The new **settlement** brought disaster to Australia's **Indigenous peoples** because the newcomers took their lands. This event marks the beginning of Australia as we know it today.

After 1788, Australians slowly expanded their knowledge of the lands south of the **equator**. They explored the Australian outback and coastlines, and the seas far to the south. These great journeys captured the imagination of Australians. Douglas Mawson's **expedition** to Antarctica is one of the great journeys in Australia's history.

In the early 1900s, Antarctica was one of the last unexplored wilderness areas.

Douglas Mawson's Antarctic expedition

In the brief Antarctic summer of 1912–13, Douglas Mawson and his men set off from their base Hut in Antarctica to explore the icy land. Five parties of scientists each took a different route, determined to gather information about the frozen continent.

One group trekked inland to the **magnetic pole**, while others headed along the ice-bound sea coasts. Douglas Mawson, with his two friends Xavier Mertz and Belgrave Ninnis, travelled eastwards with the help of sled dogs to map unknown territory. Antarctica turned out to be a treacherous place, as Mawson's party soon found out...

This is the story of Mawson's courageous expedition and how it changed Australia.

On his **Australasian** Antarctic Expedition, Douglas Mawson aimed to increase our scientific knowledge of Antarctica.

What does it mean?

expedition: An expedition is a journey of discovery.



The big picture

Before 1900, no one knew exactly what lay south of Australia. During the 1700s and 1800s, a few explorers sailed their ships south of the **Antarctic Circle**. They found a place of icy **blizzards** where the sea froze solid for most of the year.

In the early 1900s, explorers were determined to unlock Antarctica's secrets. During his 1901–04 expedition, Englishman Robert Scott spent two years in Antarctica. Then, in 1909, British explorer Ernest Shackleton explored parts of the frozen continent. Both men hoped to reach the South Pole.

Among the men on Shackleton's expedition was an Australian rock scientist, Douglas Mawson. He did not want to explore Antarctica for fame or to claim territory for his country, but for scientific knowledge. At that time, the part of Antarctica nearest to Australia was unexplored. Mawson believed that Australians should be the first to map and study this land. In 1911, he decided to make his own scientific expedition to Antarctica.

What does it mean?

Antarctic Circle: The Antarctic Circle is an imaginary circle around the South Pole.

This photograph shows Mawson and his team before they set off for Antarctica. Mawson is seated third from the left in the front row.



The Australasian Antarctic Expedition

Mawson's **Australasian** Antarctic Expedition team planned to spend a year in Antarctica. As no ships could reach the party during the winter, they would have to take everything that they needed. The team would spend the winter making scientific studies at base camp. Then, during the short ten-week summer, small groups would trek across Antarctica and map its features before the expedition returned to Australia.

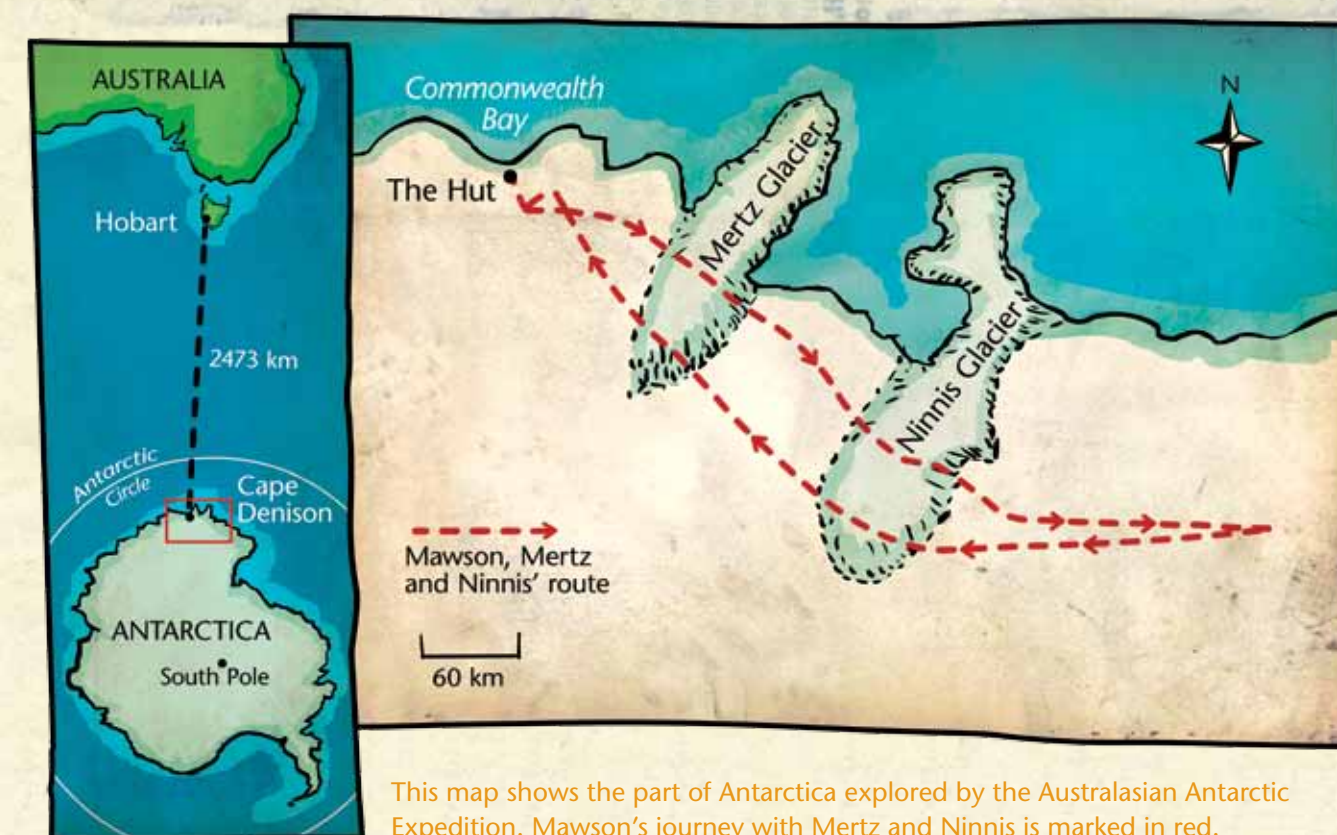
Eighteen men made up the expedition, with Douglas Mawson as their leader. Also included were 40 sled dogs from Greenland. Captain John Davis would take the party to the frozen land in the icebreaking ship *Aurora*.

On 8 January 1912, the expedition arrived in Antarctica. The men unloaded supplies at a place they named Cape Denison, after Sir Hugh Denison, who helped pay for the expedition. This would be their home for the next 12 months.

Eyewitness words

Captain Davis of the ship *Aurora* understood the dangers of Antarctica:

“...the country is a terrible one to spend a year in.”



This map shows the part of Antarctica explored by the Australasian Antarctic Expedition. Mawson's journey with Mertz and Ninnis is marked in red.

Key people

These three people played key roles in the Antarctic expedition.

Doctor Douglas Mawson

Born: 1882 in England

Role on expedition: Leader

Skills: Rock and glacier expert, experienced Antarctic explorer

Age on expedition: 30

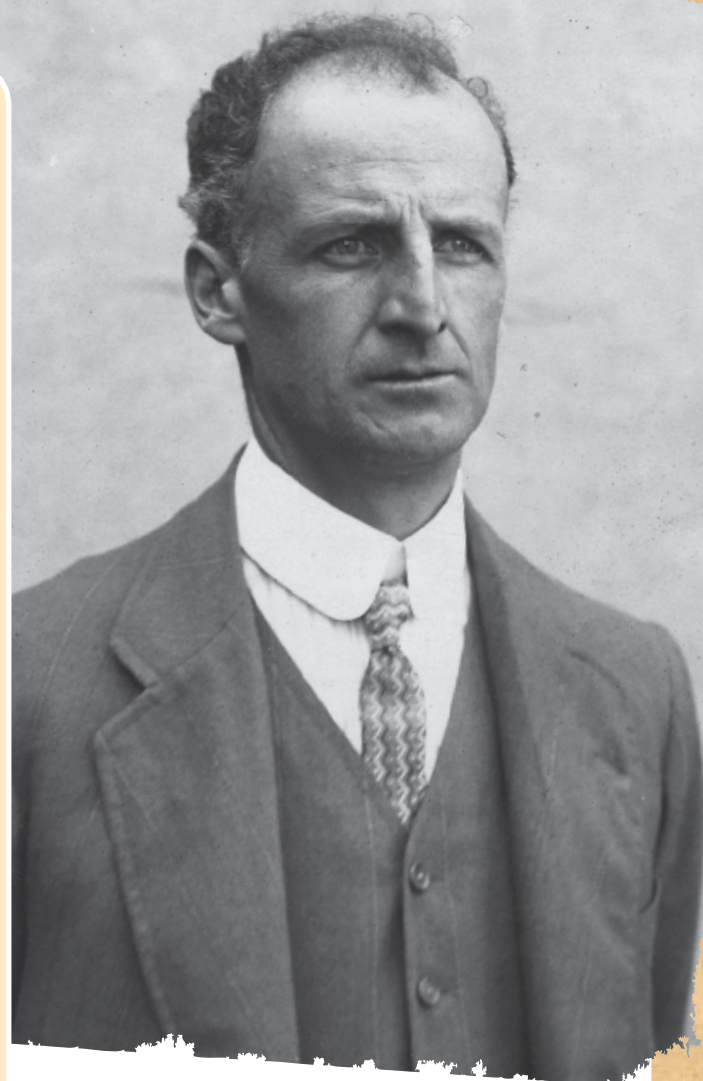
Nickname: 'Doctor' or 'D.I.'

Died: 14 October 1958

Appearance: Tall, lean, tough and wiry

Character: Clever, stern, courageous, strong-minded

Comments: Douglas Mawson was a strong leader with a quiet, strict manner. His men respected him greatly, though he worked them hard. Mawson planned every detail of the expedition brilliantly and chose excellent men. He was a true scientist and wanted the expedition to expand the world's knowledge. He was also a proud Australian, aiming to promote Australia's scientific and exploring abilities.



*f Anta
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Mawson
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Lieutenant Belgrave Ninnis

Born: 1887 in England

Role on expedition: In charge of the sled dogs

Skills: Soldier, dog handler

Age on expedition: 25

Nickname: 'Ninn' or 'Cherub'

Died: 14 December 1912

Appearance: Tall, very thin, boyish

Character: Quiet, good-natured, very keen

Comments: Belgrave Ninnis was a born soldier, enthusiastic, well liked and good at his work. He was great friends with Mertz, who looked after the sled dogs with him.

Doctor Xavier Mertz

Born: 1883 in Switzerland

Role on expedition: Dog-sled handler

Skills: Expert skier, mountain climber, rock scientist

Age on expedition: 29

Nickname: 'X'

Died: 7 January 1913

Appearance: Tall, powerfully built, hooked nose, strong jaw

Character: Full of energy, cheerful, strong-minded, generous

Comments: Mertz was a favourite among the men. He was strong, very capable and a good companion. He spoke broken English and loved to sing while skiing.



Living in Antarctica

January 1912

Douglas Mawson and the men of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition sailed south from Australia to Antarctica on the ship *Aurora*.

The *Aurora* sailed away, leaving Mawson and his men in the frozen wilderness.



The men's first job was to build huts for shelter and supplies.

HURRY, ANOTHER BLIZZARD IS COMING!



THIS WIND IS FREEZING...

30 January

The base Hut was finished, so Mawson held a short ceremony.

I CLAIM THIS LAND FOR THE KING AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE.

HOORAY!



As winter set in, Mawson and his men carried out scientific studies and planned overland treks for the following summer.

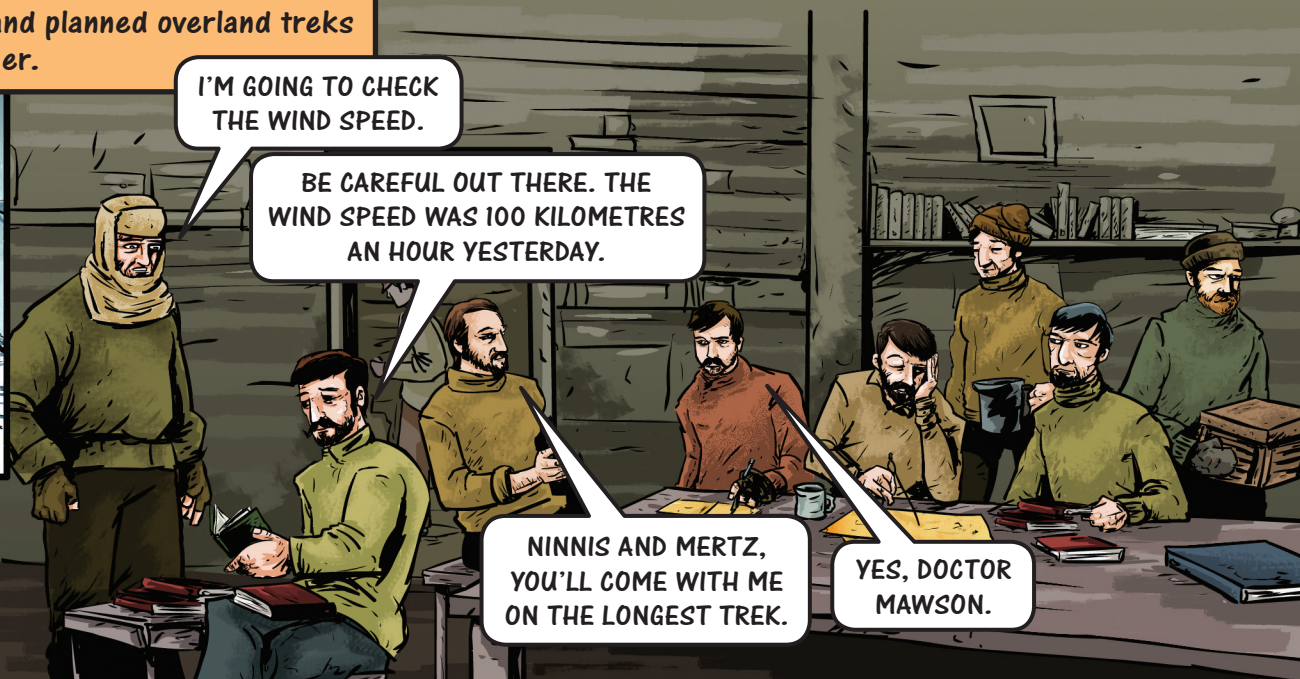


I'M GOING TO CHECK THE WIND SPEED.

BE CAREFUL OUT THERE. THE WIND SPEED WAS 100 KILOMETRES AN HOUR YESTERDAY.

NINNIS AND MERTZ, YOU'LL COME WITH ME ON THE LONGEST TREK.

YES, DOCTOR MAWSON.



When summer arrived, the men dug an ice cave nine kilometres inland from the Hut, to store food and fuel.

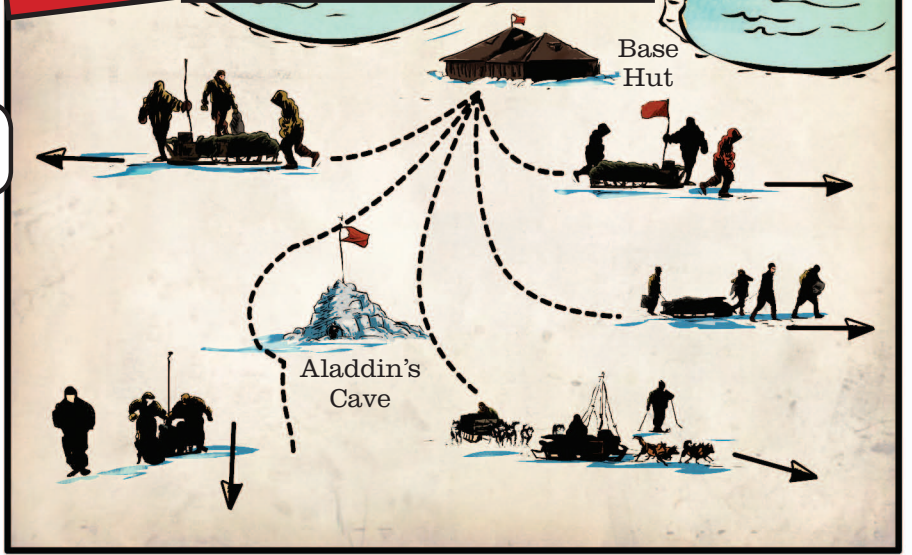
THIS WILL BE A STORE BASE FOR THE TREKKING PARTIES.

WE'LL CALL IT ALADDIN'S CAVE!



Early November 1912

Five trekking parties set off in different directions.



10 November 1912

Douglas Mawson, Belgrave Ninnis and Xavier Mertz headed east across two vast glaciers.



WATCH YOUR STEP, NINNIS...

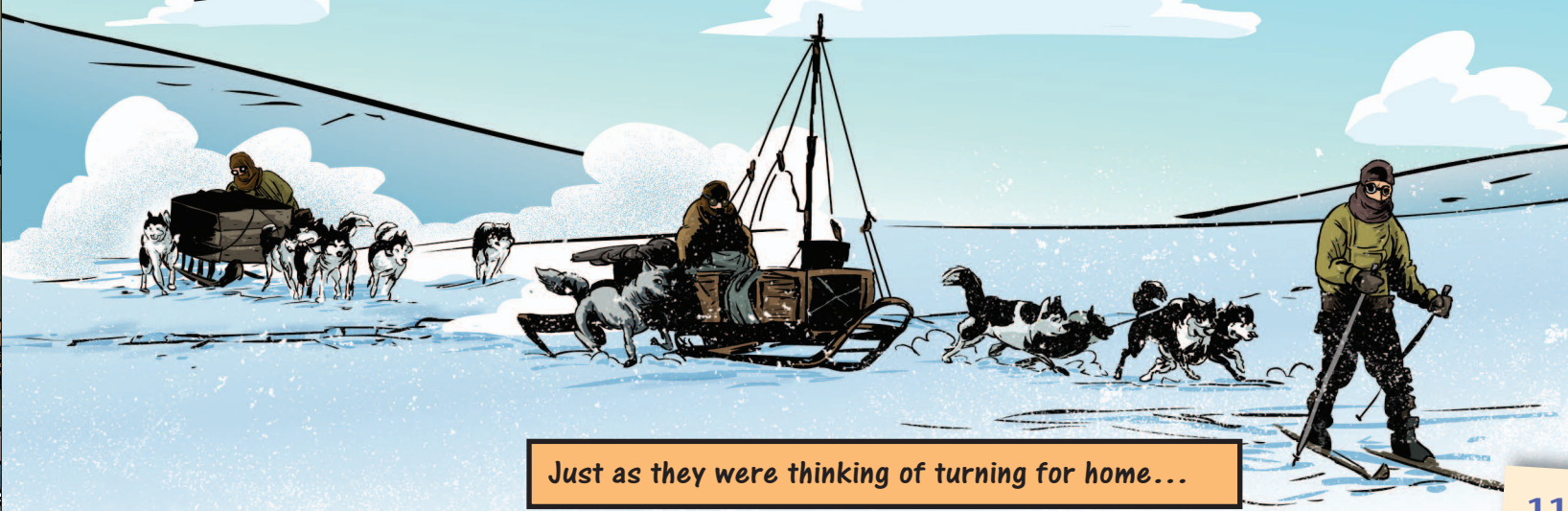
Many times they fell into crevasses, but were saved by their ropes and harnesses.

They made good progress, mapping the icy land along the way.



14 December 1912

Mawson, Mertz and Ninnis had trekked 483 kilometres from the base Hut at Cape Denison.



Just as they were thinking of turning for home...



WHERE'S NINNIS?



NINNIS, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

NINNIS!
WHERE ARE YOU?

Mawson and Mertz called out for three hours, but there was no reply.



OUR ROPES WON'T REACH THE BOTTOM.

HE MUST BE DEAD IF HE FELL THAT FAR.

To make things worse, almost all the food had been on Ninnis's sled. Now it was lost.

Later that day...



LORD, RECEIVE NINNIS INTO YOUR CARE. ASHES TO ASHES, DUST TO DUST.

Mawson and Mertz were nearly 500 kilometres from the Hut and safety.

HERE'S THE SITUATION, MERTZ. WE HAVE SIX OF THE WEAKEST DOGS, NO DOG FOOD AND ONLY TEN DAYS' FOOD FOR US.



IT WILL BE A FIGHT WITH DEATH.

The two men started the long, lonely trek back to the Hut...



Along the way, they had to stop because of terrible blizzards.

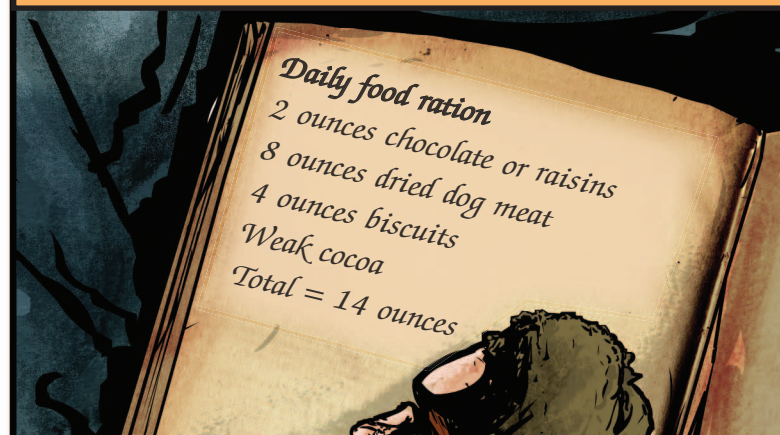


One by one, the starving dogs collapsed.



By Christmas, all the dogs had died.

As their food was running out, Mawson cooked and dried the dog meat to add to their food stores.



Daily food ration
2 ounces chocolate or raisins
8 ounces dried dog meat
4 ounces biscuits
Weak cocoa
Total = 14 ounces

They had about one-third of their normal rations, which was just enough to stay alive.

New Year's Eve
1912

Mertz began to feel sick.

NO DOG MEAT TODAY.
IT MAKES ME ILL.

HERE, HAVE SOME
RAISINS AND CHOCOLATE.
THAT SHOULD MAKE YOU
FEEL BETTER.

Mertz's condition got worse. He began to behave
strangely...

WHAT HAVE YOU
DONE, MERTZ?

I HAVE
FROSTBITE. LOOK!

Mertz had bitten off his
finger! He had Vitamin A
poisoning from eating dog
liver, which was affecting
his mind.

6 January
1913

Mertz could no longer walk...

Mawson strapped Mertz onto the sled,
but after only a short distance...

STOP! I'M
TOO COLD.

OK, MY FRIEND.
WE'LL CAMP HERE.

7 January

Mertz was too ill to move.

IF ONLY I COULD GET ON
BUT I MUST STOP WITH
XAVIER. BOTH OUR CHANCES
ARE GOING NOW.

That night, Mertz lost his mind...

LOOK!

THERE'S THE
SHIP COME TO
RESCUE US!

IT'S ALRIGHT
OLD CHAP...

THIS IS TERRIBLE.
I PRAY GOD TO HELP US.

Later that night...

8 January

HE HAS DONE HIS DUTY
AND PASSED ON.

...Xavier Mertz was dead.

Viewpoints

Douglas Mawson faced terrible choices on his trek back to base camp. He had to leave Belgrave Ninnis in a **crevasse**, not knowing whether he was dead or alive. When Xavier Mertz became too ill to walk, Mawson faced an awful decision. He could leave Mertz and save himself, or care for his friend and risk dying with him.

Reasons for leaving Mertz

Every day that Mawson spent camped with the dying Mertz meant less food for the trek back. Mertz was going to die anyway, whether Mawson stayed with him or not. The weather conditions were good for trekking and waiting with Mertz wasted the last of the good weather before winter. Mawson was also carrying all the maps and scientific results of his party's explorations. He needed to get these back to base camp, or his men's efforts would be wasted.

[illegible]

Mawson's valuable scientific records from the expedition included these weather records.

Reasons for staying with Mertz

As leader of the expedition, Mawson had got Mertz into this trouble. He had a duty to stay and look after him. Mertz was a good friend who needed comfort and care, and it would be heartless to leave him to die alone. Although he was ill, Mertz was company for Mawson and made Mawson feel less lonely. Mawson did not expect to survive, so there was little point in struggling on by himself.

Mertz's illness delayed Mawson by four days. Mawson understood that his own survival was at stake. Mawson chose to stay with Mertz until he died.

Eyewitness words

On 6 January 1913, Mawson wrote in his diary:

“ If only I could get on; but I must stop with Xavier. He does not appear to be improving and both our chances are going now. ”



Mawson turned his record of the journey into a book called *The Home of the Blizzard*.

A fight with death

With Mertz and Ninnis dead, Mawson was all alone, 160 kilometres from the Hut and very short of food.

8 January 1913

Mawson sawed his sled in half so he could drag it along more easily.

Frostbitten and starving, he began the terrible journey, struggling through blizzards...



I'LL GO ON AS FAR AS I CAN. IF A SEARCH PARTY FINDS MY BODY, AT LEAST THEY'LL FIND THE MAPS WE MADE.



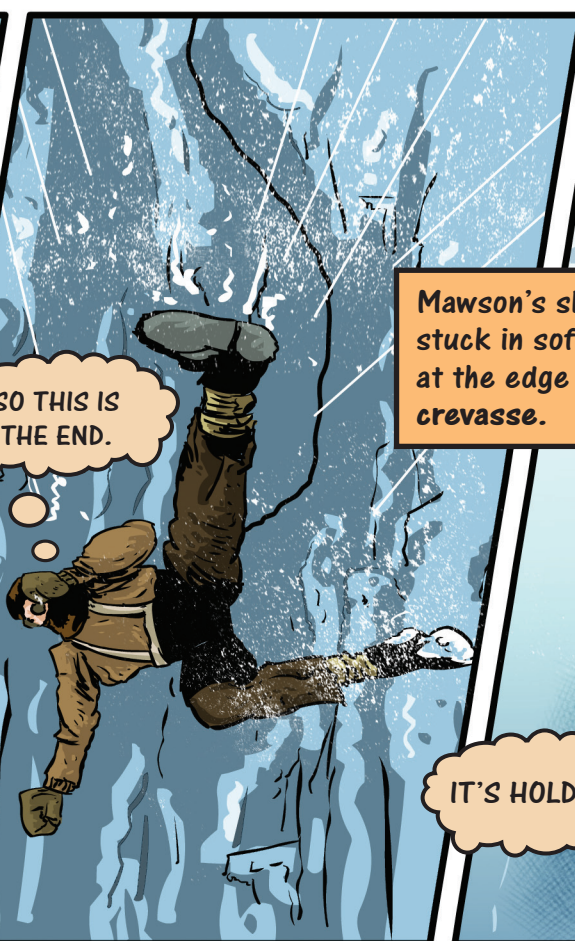
...and injury.

THE SOLES OF MY FEET ARE FALLING OFF!

NOTHING TO DO BUT MAKE THE BEST OF IT.

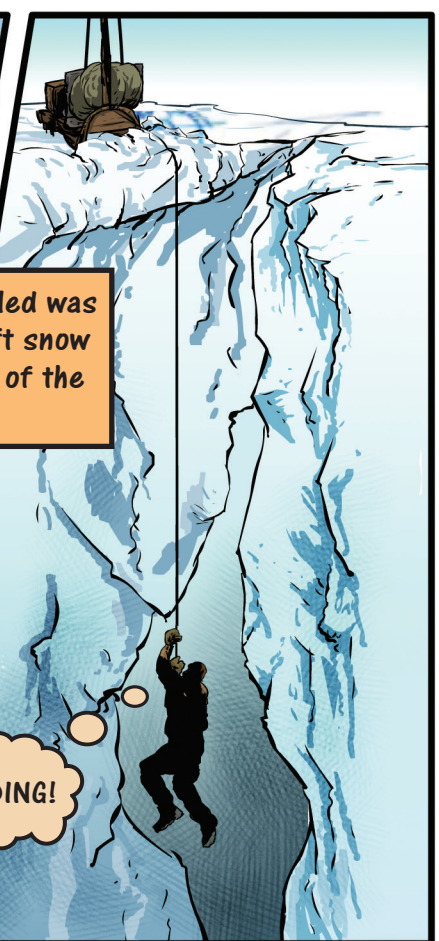


17 January



SO THIS IS THE END.

Mawson's sled was stuck in soft snow at the edge of the crevasse.



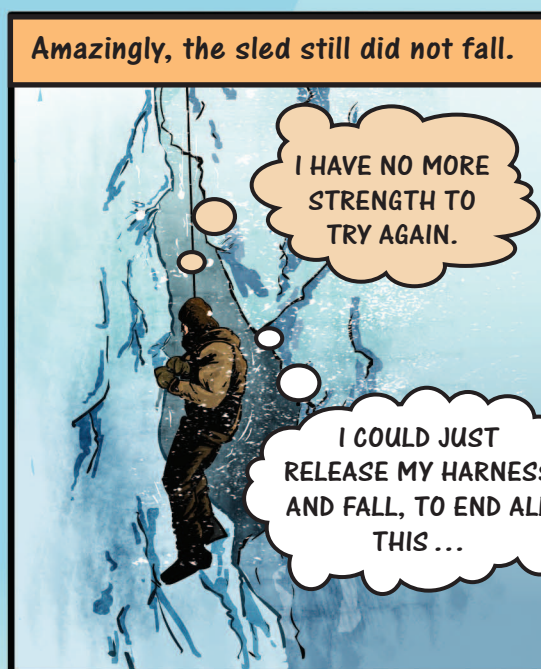
IT'S HOLDING!



Mawson reached the top of the crevasse...



...but then!



Amazingly, the sled still did not fall.

I HAVE NO MORE STRENGTH TO TRY AGAIN.

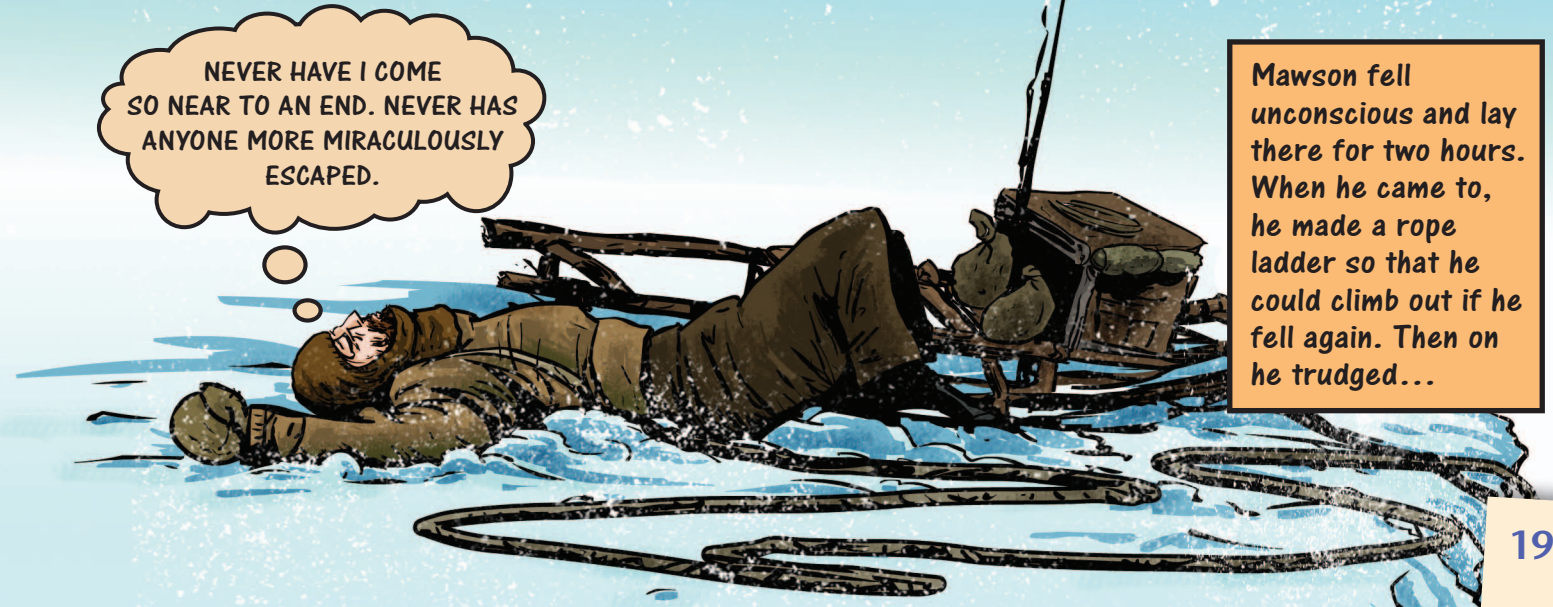
I COULD JUST RELEASE MY HARNESS AND FALL, TO END ALL THIS...



ONE... MORE... TIME...



Gnnh!



NEVER HAVE I COME SO NEAR TO AN END. NEVER HAS ANYONE MORE MIRACULOUSLY ESCAPED.

Mawson fell unconscious and lay there for two hours. When he came to, he made a rope ladder so that he could climb out if he fell again. Then on he trudged...

28 January
1913

Eleven days later, Mawson reached the top of a hill and saw Cape Denison in the far distance...

MAYBE I'LL MAKE IT
BACK TO THE HUT
AFTER ALL...

...but he was almost out of food.

The next day...

WHAT'S
THIS?

Mawson stumbled upon a food store put there
that day by a search party from the Hut.

A FEW HUNDRED METRES
TO EITHER SIDE, AND IT WOULD
HAVE BEEN LOST TO SIGHT.
IT'S ANOTHER MIRACLE!

The food and the note
gave Mawson the energy
he needed to go on.

To the Far Eastern Party
Distance to Aladdin's cave
is 37 kilometres.
Ship Aurora is waiting
at Cape Denison for your
return. Food is in the bag.
28 January 1913.

1 February
7 p.m.

ALADDIN'S CAVE
AT LAST!

A PINEAPPLE AND
ORANGES! THE AURORA MUST
HAVE BROUGHT THEM.

Mawson was safe, warm and well-fed at last, just
nine kilometres from the Hut and safety.

But then...

I CAN'T GO
OUT IN THIS
BLIZZARD.

The terrible blizzard lasted for seven days.

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR FROM THE HUT.

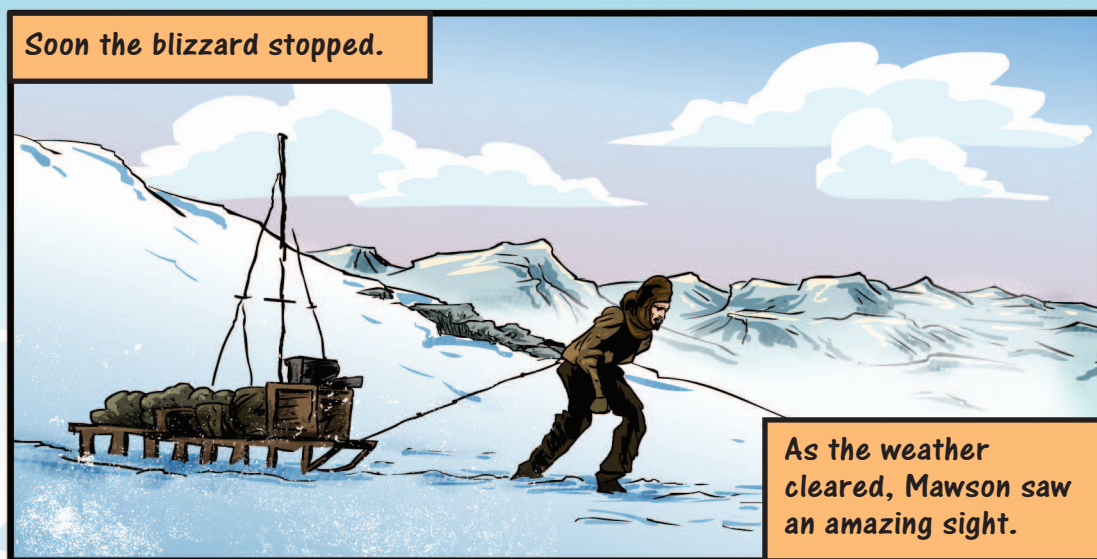


8 February 1913, 6 a.m.

I CAN'T WAIT ANY LONGER. I'LL HAVE TO GO ON.



Soon the blizzard stopped.



As the weather cleared, Mawson saw an amazing sight.

The Hut at last! Far away on the horizon, however...

THE AURORA! IT'S SAILING AWAY!

The Aurora had left earlier that day, leaving five men behind to wait for Mawson's missing party.

That evening...

Mawson staggered towards the Hut, almost unrecognisable from starvation and frostbite.

GOOD GOD, WHICH ONE ARE YOU?

IT'S DOCTOR MAWSON! HE'S ALIVE!

9 February 1913

CAPE DENISON CALLING AURORA: MAWSON HAS RETURNED! PLEASE COME BACK AND GET US!

YES, DOCTOR MAWSON. CAPTAIN DAVIS SAYS AURORA IS 130 KILOMETRES AWAY. THEY'RE TURNING AROUND.

ARE YOU GETTING THROUGH, JEFFRYES?



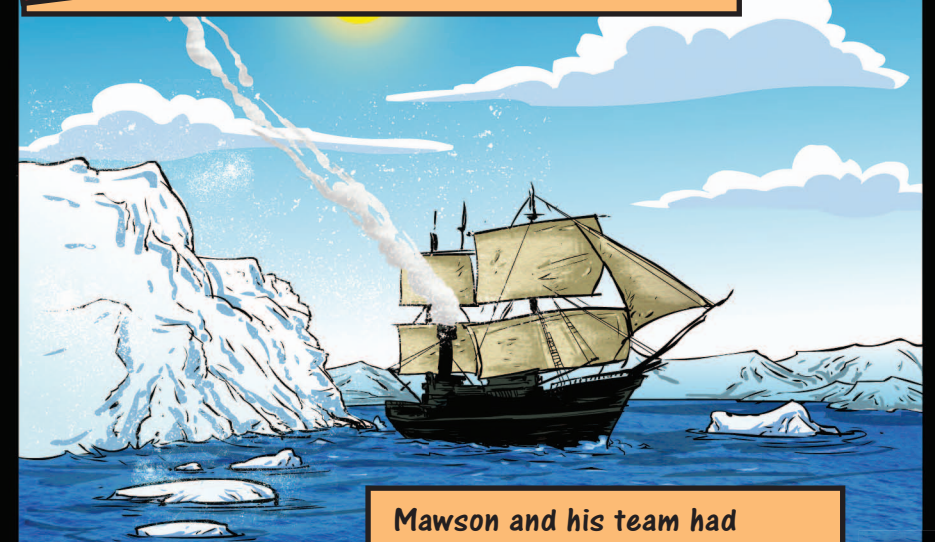
However, just as the Aurora sailed back into Cape Denison, a blizzard swept in.



The ship had to sail away without them. Mawson and the other five men had to spend another ten months in Antarctica!

December 1913

Finally, Captain Davis returned in the Aurora to rescue the men.



Mawson and his team had spent 23 months in Antarctica.

What happened next?

During their second winter in Antarctica, Mawson and the other five men ran short of food to eat and oil for their stoves. They had to eat penguins to survive and used seal **blubber** for fuel. Worse still, the new radio operator, Sidney Jeffryes, could not cope with the conditions and lost his mind. In spite of this, the men at the Hut continued to create scientific records of Antarctica.

The Home of the Blizzard

Mawson spent many months recovering from his terrible journey. He used the long Antarctic winter to write a book about his experiences, *The Home of the Blizzard*, which was published in 1915.

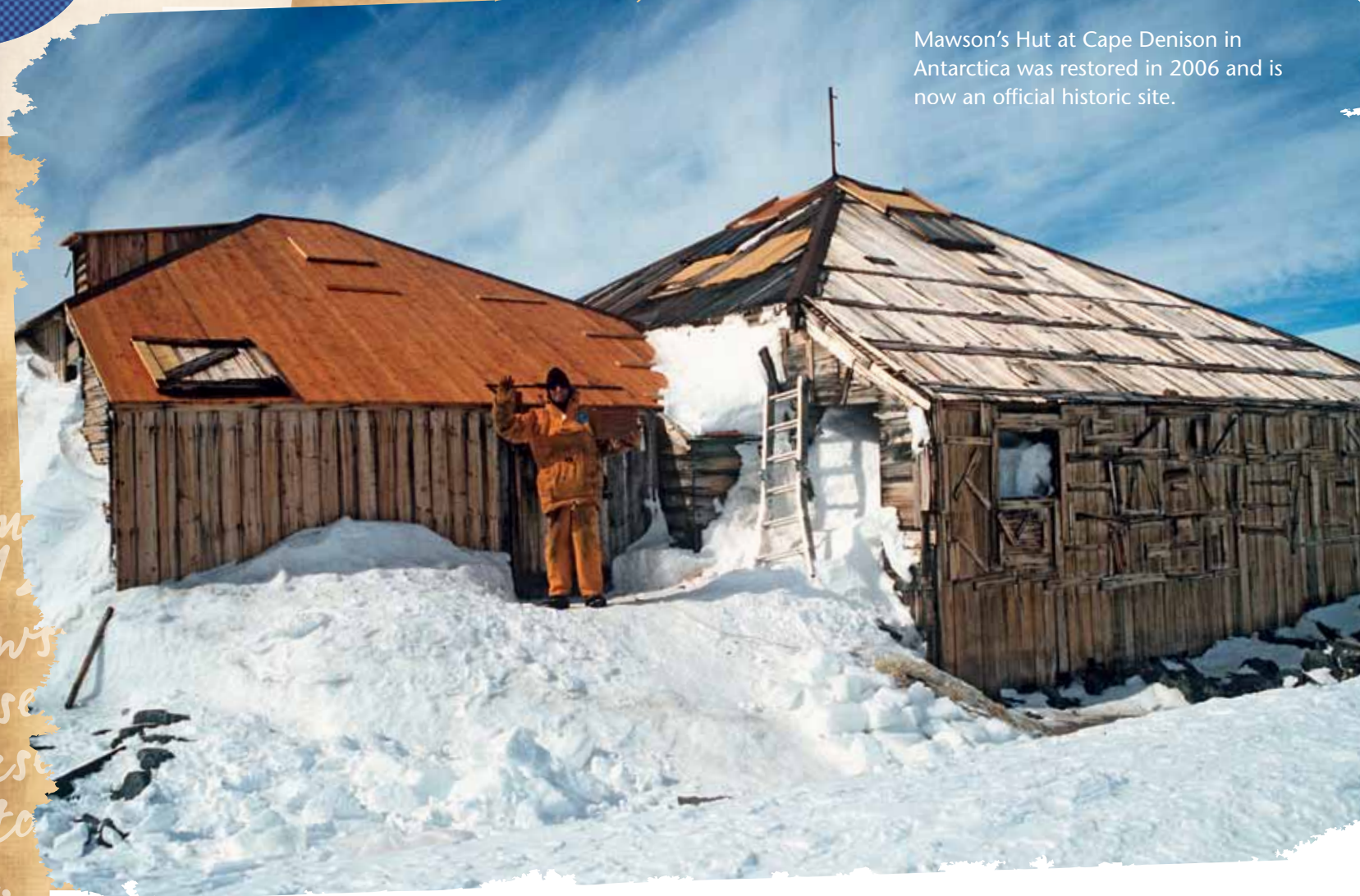
Mawson named the Ninnis and Mertz Glaciers after his two friends who died on them. This photograph is of the Mertz Glacier.

Eyewitness words

When Mawson realised that he would have to spend another year in Antarctica, he made the best of it. In his book, *The Home of the Blizzard*, he wrote:

“ Well, what matter! The long journey was at an end – a terrible chapter of my life was concluded. ”

Brief Account
of 1914-15
Mawson's
men set
their base
in Antarctica to
land.



Mawson's Hut at Cape Denison in Antarctica was restored in 2006 and is now an official historic site.

Return to Australia

At last, in January 1914, Mawson and the remaining men of the **Australasian** Antarctic Expedition arrived back in Australia. They were welcomed as heroes. The expedition was hailed as one of the most successful and important scientific expeditions of its time.

Unfortunately, in August of that year, World War I (1914–18) broke out. This terrible war overshadowed the expedition's achievements and prevented the men from finishing their important scientific work. Mawson and many of his men joined the war in Europe, where some of them died. Others took years before they returned to their research.

So much scientific knowledge was gained from the Mawson Antarctic expedition that it took more than 20 years to write up the reports. Mawson continued his Antarctic explorations in 1929–31 on board the ship *Discovery*. His scientific research on the landscape and animals of Antarctica was admired around the world.

The effects of Mawson's expedition

Douglas Mawson's Antarctic expedition of 1911–14 had wide-ranging effects.

Australian Antarctic Territory

Mawson claimed the part of Antarctica that lies closest to Tasmania for Australia. In a later expedition in 1929–31 aboard the ship *Discovery*, Mawson explored 2494 kilometres of Antarctic coastline. This led to about half of Antarctica's land being claimed as Australian Antarctic Territory in 1936. In 1954, Australia set up Antarctica's first permanent base, named Mawson, about 3000 kilometres west of Cape Denison.

Scientific knowledge

Mawson's expedition of 1911–14 raised the status of Australian science around the world. Weather **observations** taken in Antarctica led to better forecasting in Australia. Mawson's successful two-year stay in Antarctica, and the wealth of scientific information he gathered, led to permanent bases being set up there. The **Australasian** Antarctic Expedition's focus on the importance of scientific research also helped to save the Antarctic environment. Today, mining and other damaging activities are banned in the Australian Antarctic Territory.

Whatever happened to ...

Douglas Mawson?

Douglas Mawson married his fiancée, Paquita Delprat, in 1914 and was **knighted** Sir Douglas in the same year. In 1920, he was awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE) to recognise his achievements. After returning from World War I, he went back to his job as Professor of **Geology** at the University of Adelaide, where he worked for the rest of his life. Sir Douglas Mawson died in 1958 aged 76.

Timeline

This timeline shows the most important events related to Mawson's Antarctic expedition.

1772–75

Captain James Cook sails around the southern oceans near Antarctica but does not see the mainland.

1822–24

Englishman James Weddell sails further south than anyone has sailed before.

1840

Charles Wilkes' American expedition finds evidence that Antarctica is a continent.

1839–43

James Clark Ross discovers the Ross Sea and Mount Erebus, an active volcano.

1819–21

Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen sails to within 32 kilometres of mainland Antarctica.



1901–04

Robert Scott's *Discovery* expedition fails to reach the South Pole.

1912

Robert Scott dies returning from the South Pole.

1929–31

Mawson's *Discovery* expedition.

1958

Vivian Fuchs crosses the Antarctic continent.

1750

1800

1850

1900

1950

1908–09

Douglas Mawson makes his first trip to Antarctica with Ernest Shackleton.

1911

Roald Amundsen reaches the South Pole.

1911–14

Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition.



What do you think?

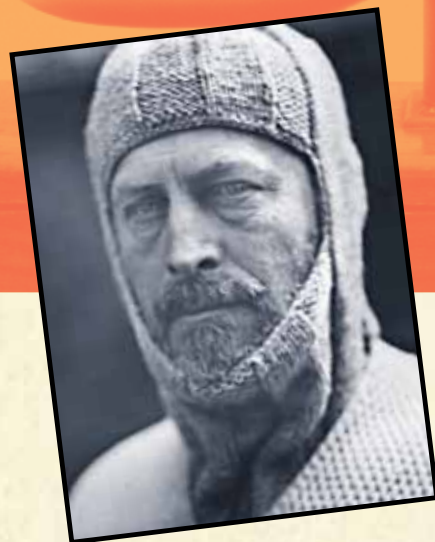
Mawson's expedition to Antarctica raises questions about the impact of humans on wilderness areas and the way in which people behave under pressure. Try the following activities to test your own ideas about these important subjects.

Who is right?

Mawson believed that Antarctica should be saved for scientific study and **conservation**. Today, Antarctica is protected from development under international law, but people disagree about its future. Read the following opinions and have a discussion in class about who you think is right.

The conservationists

Antarctica is a wilderness unlike any other place in the world. It has unique animals and landscapes that are fragile and easily destroyed by people. Antarctica should be protected for all time.



The developers

Antarctica is just like any other land and people should make use of it. As ice melts due to **global warming**, Antarctic land will be available to mine for metals and drill for oil. There might be great riches there. Tourism to Antarctica is increasing too and offers people new holiday choices.

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What would you do?

Extreme situations, like the one Mawson faced, force people to make difficult choices. This is still true today. In May 2006, on the frozen slopes of Mount Everest, climber David Sharp became ill 300 metres below the peak. About 40 climbers walked past him, leaving him to die alone.

Mark Inglis, one of the men who walked past, later said that he would do it again:

“I know... the situation that I walked past, that I saw, had only one ending [that David Sharp would die]. Of that I am confident. That's why... I sleep at night.”

The Age, Melbourne, 26 May 2006

Famous mountaineers Sir Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay were the first to climb Mount Everest in 1953. Sir Edmund was horrified about what happened to David Sharp:

“We would never have left a man... He was a human being, and we would regard it as our duty to get him back to safety.”

The Guardian, London, 29 May 2006

What would you have done?

Find out more

Websites

<http://www.mawsonshuts.aq>

This Australian Government website covers every aspect of Mawson's **Australasian** Antarctic Expedition. It includes satellite maps, historical photographs, an interactive adventure for students and extensive links. There is also some information about the restoration of Mawson's Hut in 2006. Students may need help with navigation.

http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/natural_world/antarctica/hurley/index.html

Frank Hurley was the world-famous photographer on Mawson's Antarctic expedition. This State Library of New South Wales website has a collection of photos of Mawson's expedition. It also includes information about other Antarctic expeditions.

<http://www.south-pole.com>

This site covers the history of Antarctic exploration. It includes explorers' biographies, original documents and photos. It has lots of historical information on Antarctica.

<http://www.aad.gov.au>

This website of the Australian Antarctic Division includes live webcams and up-to-date information about the Antarctic bases today.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6137>

The full text of Douglas Mawson's book about his 1911–14 expedition, *The Home of the Blizzard*, is available here for download.

Places to visit

In the Footsteps of Douglas Mawson, South Australian Museum

This exhibition includes Mawson's sled, letters, photos and a model of the Hut.



Glossary

Australasian from Australia, New Zealand or the neighbouring islands

blizzards severe snow storms with strong winds

blubber the layer of protective fat around whales and seals

conservation protection of the natural environment

convict someone serving a sentence in jail for committing a crime

crevasse a deep crack in ice

equator an imaginary line around the centre of the Earth

geology the science of rocks

glaciers frozen rivers of ice

global warming an increase in temperature in the Earth's climate due to higher levels of carbon dioxide trapping heat

indigenous peoples the original peoples of a country or region

knighted to be raised to the rank of knight by the Queen or King of England

magnetic pole one of two magnetic points at the opposite ends of the Earth

observations things that have been noticed from looking at something carefully

settlement a place where people live

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