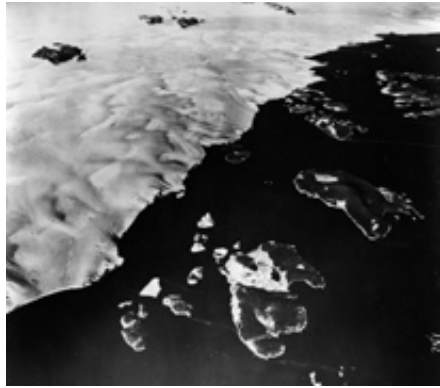


Mawson station, est. 1954: a signal achievement

Dark specks in an ocean of whiteness. Black and white aerial photographs of the edge of Antarctica, 5000 kilometres and more to the southwest of Australia, showing tiny, rare outcrops of rock all but buried under the continent's immense ice sheet. Images of places that humans never took any notice of till now, now that someone was looking for a reliable landing place on a notoriously unreliable coast.



US NAVY



PHILLIP LAW



LAW COLLECTION



R THOMPSON

Those photographs, from the US Navy's Operation Highjump some six years previously, formed the basis of a decision by Phillip Law, director of the Antarctic Division of Australia's Department of External Affairs, to take a ship chartered at considerable expense to the Australian taxpayer to the Antarctic coast at 67°36'S, 62° 52'E in the summer of 1953–54. On the strength of a promise of government funding for just one year he aimed to set up a permanent Australian Antarctic settlement – the first by any country south of the Antarctic Circle.

The whole enterprise was little more than a calculated gamble, but it was a gamble that paid off, many times over. The station built on these shores possessed the only natural rocky harbour in thousands of kilometres of icy coastline and gave Australia its first vital foothold on the Antarctic continent.

To get there, the Australian government chartered *Kista Dan*, a 65-metre ice-strengthened ship built in 1952 for the Danish shipping company J. Lauritzen and Co. of Copenhagen, under the command of Captain Hans Christian Petersen and a Danish crew. It was the start of a 34-year association between the company and Australia's Antarctic program that ended with the foundering and scuttling of *Nella Dan* at Macquarie Island in 1987.

Calling at Heard and Kerguelen Islands on the way down, to collect men, sledge dogs and supplies, Law's expedition headed into the ice – the first Australian foray to this part of Antarctica since Mawson's last Antarctic journey nearly a quarter of a century earlier. The ship's besetment, storm damage to the two support aircraft, and the near-loss of an oversnow vehicle which broke through thin sea ice failed to daunt Law and his party.

On Thursday 11 February, Petersen gingerly steered *Kista Dan* into Horseshoe

Harbour to begin an Antarctic adventure that continues to this day. Phillip Law's sense of occasion did not let him down. Here is his 2004 recollection (aged nearly 92) of the naming ceremony:

‘...with unloading half finished and construction of huts proceeding, I gathered the men around a flag pole beside the Caravans, raised the Australian flag, and said: ‘In the name of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, I raise the Australian flag on Australian Antarctic Territory and I name the site of this new ANARE station “Mawson” in honour of the great Australian Antarctic explorer and scientist, Sir Douglas Mawson.’

The Royal Australian Air Force aircraft mechanics on board made one aircraft out of the remains of two and the aerial coastal surveys went ahead as planned. The ground party got to work erecting the wooden living hut, the aluminium-clad work hut, the wooden engine room and workshop, and the galvanised-iron store. After less than two weeks the essentials were in place. *Kista Dan* sailed out of Horseshoe Harbour on 23 February leaving behind the shore party under Bob Dovers: Lem Macey, Bill Harvey, Bill Storer, Jeff Gleadell, John Russell, Bruce Stinear, Bob Dingle, Robert Summers and Georges Schwartz (a French observer).

In the relatively recent history of human activities in Antarctica, Australia enjoys a place out of all proportion to the size of its population and economy. Douglas Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911–14 proved to be the pre-eminent scientific expedition of Antarctica's ‘heroic era’ of the early 1900s. From 1929 to 1931 Mawson led a combined

From top: 1. The photograph that started it all. From this photograph – taken by the US ‘Operation Highjump’ in the summer of 1946–47 – Dr Phillip Law picked out with a magnifying glass the site of what was to become Mawson station. The little rocky outcrop in the shape of a horseshoe which looked as though it might be a natural harbour can be seen in the top third of the photograph. 2. Kista Dan anchored at Horseshoe Harbour, the best natural harbour on the whole coastline of Greater Antarctica, February 1954. 3. One of the Auster aircraft on the ice with Kista Dan. 4. Raising the flag and naming Mawson station, 13 February 1954. Phillip Law is standing at the foot of the flagpole.



PHILLIP LAW



LAW COLLECTION

Top: A welcome chocolate break from unloading stores. Building materials and supplies were transported over the sea ice by Weasels (the oversnow tracked vehicles on the left) from Kista Dan to the site of Mawson station.

Above: Mawson station takes shape. Australia's first post-war – and first permanent – station on the Antarctic continent under construction. By the time Kista Dan left Mawson on 23 February 1954, three huts were completed. At the end of 1954 the station comprised six elaborate huts, and the power units, radio and some of the meteorological equipment were permanently installed.

British, Australian and New Zealand expedition that made the first systematic exploration of the East Antarctic coast, laying the foundation of Australia's later claim to the vast land areas beyond. And Australia was a leader of the Antarctic push in the years immediately following the Second World War: in the summer of 1947–48 the first of the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) set up bases on subantarctic Heard and Macquarie Islands.

The 1954 landing by Law's *Kista Dan* expedition at Horseshoe Harbour was a culmination of these momentous achievements. It can be argued that it was the single most important event in the long history of Australia's association with the Antarctic. The establishment of the station named for Australia's Antarctic pioneer was the beginning of an Australian presence on the continent that has lasted to this day, with all the scientific advantages allowed by a continuous presence and unbroken observing programs.

It was certainly a high point in the career of Phillip Garth Law. Law's leadership qualities were recognised by the Chifley government when it appointed him the first Antarctic Division Director at the tender age of 36, and the Menzies government which followed continued to support his adventurous southern endeavours until Law's retirement from Antarctic work in 1966. The establishment of Mawson station brought together the old and new: Douglas Mawson, then aged 71, was still alive to enjoy acclaim as the elder statesman of Australia's Antarctic effort, while Law, thirty



THE AGE

Mawson is briefed on Mawson: Dr Phillip Law shows Sir Douglas Mawson the first published photograph of Mawson station after his return to Melbourne in March 1954.

years his junior, was in the prime of his life, and his career.

It is fitting that Law and eight of his associates on that great adventure were able to enjoy the celebration of Mawson station's jubilee in 2004. With him on the occasion of an Australia Post commemorative stamp launch on 13 February 2004 were retired Captain Bill Pedersen, who had been Hans Petersen's second officer, along with men from the party that erected Mawson station: Bill Storer from the wintering party, Jim Brooks, Ken Duffell, Fred Elliott, Arthur Gwynn, Ray Seaver and Dick Thompson.

PETER BOYER, WRITER, HISTORIAN & FORMER AAD MANAGER

Australia Post celebrates 50th anniversary of Mawson station

The 50th anniversary of Mawson station is celebrated on this year's set of Australian Antarctic Territory stamps. The first 50c stamp shows the flagraising ceremony, with the pioneer party gathered around barge caravans. The other 50 cent stamp shows, with some artistic licence, Mawson as the station is today. The dollar stamp has men relaxing on packing crates, enjoying a tea break. The Auster emperor penguin rookery about 40 kilometres east-north-east of Mawson is on the \$1.45 stamp.

Accompanied at the Australia Post function in Melbourne by several members of the founding party, Dr Phil Law launched the stamps on 13th February — exactly fifty years after he raised the flag on the rocky shores of Horseshoe Harbour.



AUSTRALIA POST



AUSTRALIA POST

Above: Members of the Mawson pioneer party at the Australia Post stamp launch, 13 February, 2004. Left to right – Arthur Gwynn, Fred Elliott, Ray Seaver, Dick Thompson, Bill Storer, Ken Duffell, Jim Brooks, Bill Pedersen and Phillip Law.

Left: Dr Phillip Law inspects the Mawson 50th anniversary stamps at the launch in the National Philatelic Centre.