CHRISTO BAARS

FEATURE

How did we get here? A bumpy ride from Melbourne to Hobart

The quarter century has seen the introduction of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft for deep field support. For almost 40 years, huskies were used to explore otherwise inaccessible parts of the Australian Antarctic Territory. Their departure in 1993, as a result of the 1991 Environmental Protocol, saw vehicles and aircraft take over this role. Our CASA 212-400 aircraft now provide logistic and scientific capacity between stations and into the field.

We are proud of our contribution to Hobart and the state of Tasmania. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Hobart welcomed and supported a large number of Antarctic pioneers, including Dumont d'Urville, James Clark Ross, Roald Amunsden and Douglas Mawson. For some 50 years, however, the city was passed over in favour of other ports. That all changed in 1981. Hobart has since played host to hundreds of Antarctic research and tourist ships from many nations, and employs some 800 people in Antarctic-related activities.

The importance of Hobart as an Antarctic gateway will escalate this summer with the commencement of trial flights of a jet aircraft between Hobart and Antarctica. In our 25th anniversary year here, it is fitting that the AAD is again embarking on a venture that promises significant changes in the way we plan for expeditions, conduct science and operate in Antarctica.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the *Australian Antarctic Magazine*, celebrating 25 years of service and Antarctic endeavour in Hobart. While it is impossible to capture 25 years in 36 pages, this edition provides a snapshot of some of our major achievements. It also points towards some of the challenges that await us and, in our historical section, reflects on such pioneering spirits as Douglas Mawson and Alf Howard, who helped lay the groundwork for today's successful, modern Antarctic programme.

Tony Press

—TONY PRESS
Director, AAD

JUTTA HOSEL

The AAD headquarters was located at 568 St Kilda Road, Melbourne from 1963 until 1981.

The era of exploration that dominated the Australian Antarctic programme since the 1950s, ended with the transfer of the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) from the Department of External Affairs to the Department of Supply, and the appointment of Bryan Rofe as Director in October 1970. Rofe, a principal research scientist at the Weapons Research Establishment, did not have an Antarctic background and viewed the AAD from a new perspective.

Rofe wanted to use an old clothing factory site in South Melbourne to bring the AAD together, as it was scattered across locations in Melbourne and Tasmania. However, he died in August 1971 before his plan could be implemented and Ray Garrod, a physicist and head of the Science Branch in the Department of Education and Science, was appointed Director. Garrod continued Rofe's vision of a consolidated Division in Melbourne, but it was a vision not universally shared.

Concern over the proposal to move the AAD's cosmic ray research group from the University of Tasmania to Melbourne led to a new proposition, that the AAD be based in Hobart. This proposition was supported by the strong push for urban and regional development in Labor's 1972 platform, and subsequent Whitlam Government policy. The AAD's transfer to Hobart became government policy in 1973, with the Minister for Science approving the development of a new headquarters, which would incorporate the Hobart regional laboratory of the Australian Government Analyst.

Founding Director of the AAD, Phil Law, strenuously opposed a move to Hobart on the grounds that the city had not the technological resources, sources of supply, or the scientific support facilities necessary for a complex expeditionary headquarters. Additionally, key people would be lost and it would be more expensive to operate in Tasmania than in Melbourne.

The Government, however, showed its support for the proposal by purchasing the present-day AAD site at Kingston in May 1974. Shortly after, it became a bipartisan policy. In 1977 the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works was convened to consider the relocation of the AAD.

Alternatives to the purchased Kingston site were considered, including the IXL jam factory and the University of Tasmania. The IXL site was rejected on the grounds of expense and the difficulties imposed by the historic buildings, and the university site because of building near the skyline and problems with solid rock foundations. After hearing evidence for and against the relocation, the Committee approved the construction of the AAD headquarters and the Australian Government Analytical Laboratory at Kingston.

The Committee concluded that there was a need for a centralised complex to replace the fragmented and unsatisfactory accommodation of the AAD, but that the glaciology group should remain in Melbourne. The glaciology group did eventually transfer to Hobart in 1992, but to the University of Tasmania, as part of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Cooperative Research Centre.

Construction commenced on 16 October 1978. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser unveiled a plaque set on a piece of Mawson granite at Kingston on 26 February 1979 to recognise the commencement of works. Construction proceeded with remarkable speed towards planned completion in early 1981. The whole complex would cater for 120 permanent staff, and up to 200 during the Antarctic season.

Although not included in the considerations of the Public Works Committee, other facilities were constructed to support the AAD. These included a block of 20 two-bedroom units in Lower Sandy Bay, and the Bernacchi Training Facility at Lake Augusta in the Central Highlands. These no longer operate as AAD facilities.

For the staff of the AAD a decision was required – move to Hobart or stay in Melbourne? About half the staff (44) decided to transfer and the rest either resigned or transferred to other government departments. As the Relocation Project Officer, I was the last person to transfer, on Good Friday – just four days prior to the official opening by Prince Charles on 22 April 1981. Thirteen of the original transferees are still employed by the AAD today.

Blending into the Tasmanian community was challenging for some staff, with Hobart having a country feel after the cosmopolitan city of Melbourne. People reported that 'some shops in Hobart still wrapped purchases in brown paper and string', like we did 20 years ago. Others relished the rural atmosphere. There were many social gatherings, happy hours, and sporting teams organised. However, a few people found it difficult to adjust to Tasmanian life and moved back to Melbourne within their first year.

The AAD grew over the next 25 years, with the station rebuilding programme and scientific endeavours moving into new areas of marine science, ecology and human impacts. This growth was particularly strong after a 1996 review, which recommended that five new research scientist positions be established and a further five existing positions be upgraded. Along with the research scientists came support staff, students and national and international collaborators. The existing buildings began to bulge at the seams.

On 13 February 2004, the Governor-General officially named the buildings at the Kingston site after members of the 1911-1914 Douglas Mawson expedition: Mawson, Hurley, Davis, Wild, Hannam and Harrisson.

Twenty five years since the AAD arrived in Hobart, Tasmania has become a gateway to a successful, modern Australian Antarctic programme. The AAD's Kingston headquarters will continue to provide a solid base from which to meet future challenges, including the new era of air transport.

—ROD ALLEN
General Manager, Corporate Services, AAD

His Royal Highness Prince Charles opened the Kingston headquarters on 22 April 1981.

STEVE BROWN

Kingston Headquarters in 1981 showing the 'L' shaped science building in the centre and the large warehouse for machinery and field and scientific equipment. Three buildings at the front house policy, operations and corporate administration staff.

ROBERT REEVES