

Artefacts database provides public glimpse into private lives



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This artefact is probably the infamous roulette wheel made by Hunter and Hurley that was used for 'Huntoyette', a game of chance which seemed to favour the bank over the players. The hand-made object has been fashioned from a piece of flat tin plate covered with paper on each side.

When Sir Douglas Mawson and his men departed Cape Denison after the Australasian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-1914, they left behind personal effects, rubbish and equipment, that today, provide us with an intimate glimpse into their lives. To preserve and protect this historic site, expeditioners from the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) have painstakingly catalogued, photographed and mapped thousands of artefacts strewn across five huts and the small rocky promontory that Mawson's party roamed. Clothing, photographs, tin cans, scraps of wood, scientific equipment, and caches of seals and penguins, are just some of items discovered beneath a mobile blanket of snow.

Now a publicly accessible database of these artefacts is available, thanks to the work of archaeologist Dr Estelle Lazer, the Australian Antarctic Data Centre, and the AAD Environment Policy and Protection unit. The Cape Denison Artefacts database <<http://aadc-maps.aad.gov.au/aadc/artefacts/index.cfm>> is part of a larger Australian Antarctic Heritage database that includes artefacts and information on National and Commonwealth Heritage sites and places.

According to Dr Lazer the Cape Denison database has three functions: education, research, and as a management tool for the AAD.

'The AAD needs to know what's at the site, what condition the artefacts are in and where they are, so that they can track the movement or loss of items and make decisions on whether to remove items from the site for conservation work or for safety reasons,' she said.

The database can be searched using standard museum keywords or 'keyword types', such as 'expeditioner', which brings up a list of Mawson's party members and the artefacts associated with each. The database can also be searched using a



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map of Cape Denison, or a floor plan of the Main Hut, where many personal and photographic artefacts were found.

Each artefact has a catalogue number which links to detailed information about what it is; where it was found and when; its condition and significance; who it was associated with; who made it and the material it is made from. Pictures of most artefacts will be added to the database as it develops.

Each time an artefact is examined by an archaeologist or materials conservator, the 'event' will be logged in the database. This event will record the condition and location of the artefact and follow-up notes, to assist management.

In the future, the database will be linked to electronic databases from other institutions, including the Mawson Institute and the State Library of NSW, which house artefacts and photographs from Mawson's expedition. As all keywords in these databases will be standardised, one keyword search will cover all linked databases.