

Southern rendezvous

At Mawson station, year-long preparations culminated in the departure of the final of three traverses to support the remote PCMEGA base camp at Mt Cresswell, 500 kilometres to the south.

The Prince Charles Mountains Expedition of Germany and Australia is a combined geological and geophysical program using helicopters and a Twin Otter for an extensive aerial survey of the region.

Essential supplies including over 500 drums of aircraft fuel, tents and safety equipment as well as food for 35 expeditioners for four months have been loaded on sleds with each of the three Caterpillar D7 tractors set to tow 80 tonnes.

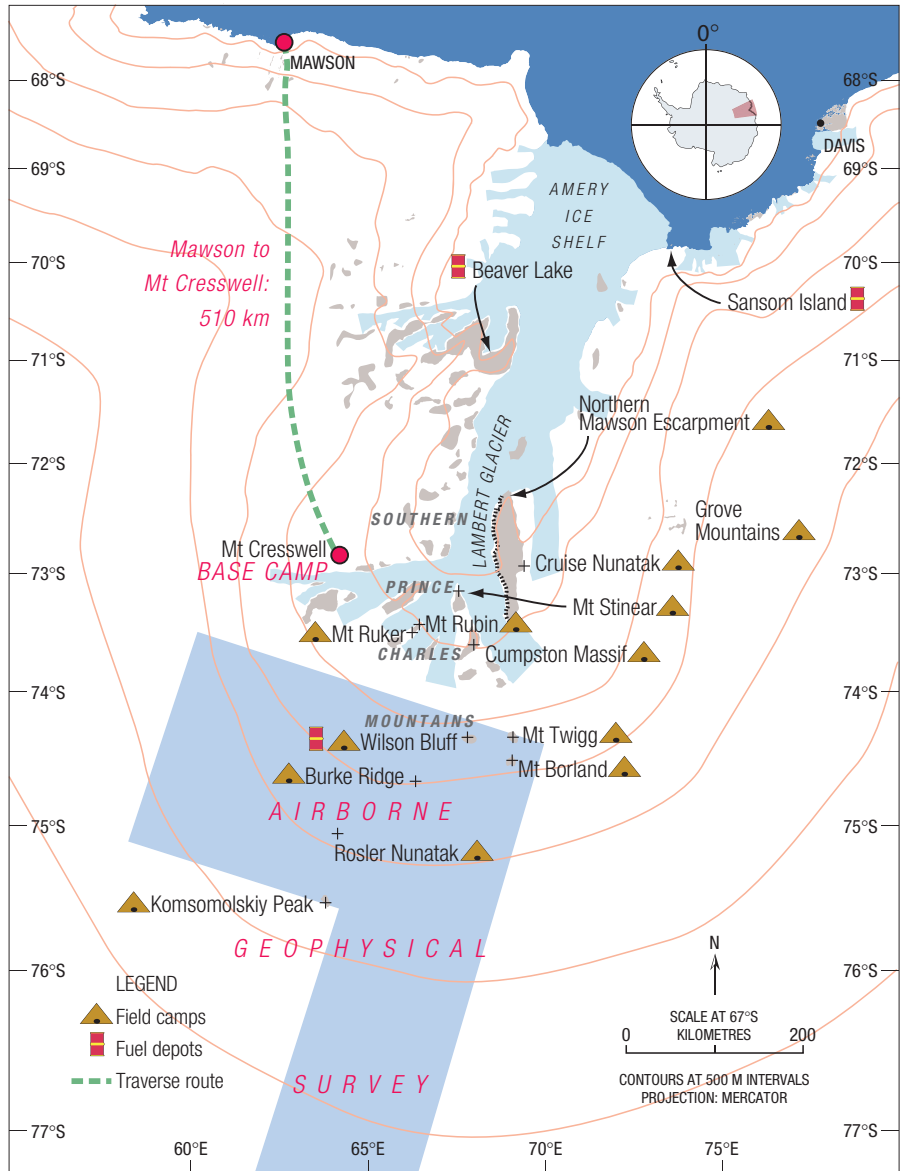
The traverse departed Mawson on 26 October and will take over a month to reach Mt Cresswell, the last two hundred kilometres of the journey being over unexplored territory. Arrival of the five-member traverse team at their barren, windswept destination will be timed to rendezvous with a Twin Otter aircraft flown into the region from Canada via South America and the South Pole. Reliant on the fuel carried on the sleds, the aircraft and two helicopters will be used to deliver field geologists to outlying camps.

Some members of the traverse team will then return to Mawson in the Twin Otter. Geophysical equipment will then be fitted in the aircraft prior to its return to the southern Prince Charles Mountains for a month of survey work several hundred kilometres further south of Mt Cresswell.

At the base camp, the tractor train will be used to house the scientists, pilots and support staff. A communications operator will maintain a watch over the field camps and aircraft, relaying up to date weather reports and forecasts prepared at Davis station 500 kilometres to the north-east.

Satellite equipment will be used by the Field Leader, Robb Clifton and Coordinating Scientists Chris Wilson and Norbert Roland, to send progress reports back to Australia and Germany.

By early February, the weather in the area will become unworkable for the field parties and they will be withdrawn to Davis to meet the resupply vessel *Polar Bird* for their



return to Hobart. With two replacement crew flown in from Mawson, the tractor train will set out for the return journey carrying the equipment, empty fuel drums and waste from the expedition, arriving at the coast in time for four members of the traverse team to board the *Aurora Australis* for the voyage home. ■

ROB EASTHER,
PCMEGA PROJECT MANAGER, AAD

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Follow the progress of the traverse and the scientific program and view the photos and the stories of PCMEGA on the AAD website at <<http://www.aad.gov.au/pcmega>>.



Vans and sleds are prepared at Mawson before being towed by tractors onto the plateau and south 500 kilometres to Mt Cresswell, PCMEGA Base Camp.

PHOTO CREDITS

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