

Remains of early 1900s plane found in Antarctica

January 3 2010, By TANALEE SMITH , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Remains of the first airplane ever taken to Antarctica, in 1912, have been found by Australian researchers, the team announced Saturday.

The Mawson's Huts Foundation had been searching for the plane for three summers before stumbling upon metal pieces of it on New Year's Day.

"The biggest news of the day is that we've found the air tractor, or at least parts of it!" team member Tony Stewart wrote on the team's blog from Cape Denison in Antarctica's Commonwealth Bay.

Australian polar explorer and geologist Douglas Mawson led two expeditions to [Antarctica](#) in the early 1900s, on the first one bringing along a single-propeller Vickers plane. The wings of the plane, built in 1911, had been damaged in a crash before the expedition, but Mawson hoped to use it as a kind of motorized sled.

Stewart said the 1911-14 Australian Antarctic Expedition used the plane to tow gear onto the ice in preparation for their sledging journeys.

But the plane's engine could not withstand the [extreme temperatures](#) and it was eventually abandoned.

The plane, the first from France's Vickers factory, had not been seen since the mid-1970s, when researchers photographed the steel fuselage

nearly encompassed in ice.

The foundation - which works at Cape Denison to conserve the huts used by Mawson in his expeditions - believed the [plane](#) would still be where it was left by Mawson, near the huts and the harbor, which is covered in ice for most of the year.

On the Net: Mawson's Huts Foundation blog: <http://www.mawsons-huts.org.au/cms/blog/>

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