

Explorers reach Mawson's Huts in Antarctica

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File photo of Commonwealth Bay, in the Australian Antarctic Territory, where two Australian explorers have battled dangerous sea ice to reach the historic Mawson's Huts, which have been isolated for years by a giant iceberg blocking the route in

Two Australian explorers have battled dangerous sea ice to reach the historic Mawson's Huts in Antarctica which have been isolated for years by a giant iceberg blocking the route in, officials said Friday.

The huts, in the eastern sector of the Australian Antarctic Territory, some 3,000 kilometres south of Hobart, were erected and occupied by the Australian Antarctic Expedition of 1911-1914 led by explorer Sir Douglas Mawson.

Conservator Ian Godfrey and heritage carpenter Jon Tucker navigated 70 kilometres (43 miles) of [sea ice](#) during a five-hour journey on an amphibious vehicle to reach the buildings on Thursday after leaving their ship.

"This has been planned for six months and was the trip of a lifetime. These vehicles travel at speeds up to 20 kilometres per hour but we had to negotiate tide cracks in the ice at times as well as pressure ridges," said Godfrey.

"Mawson's Huts seem to be in good condition but we may only have a day here so we're doing all the essentials such as changing data loggers and assessing the condition of the building structure."

The Australian Antarctic Expedition was the pre-eminent scientific expedition of its time to South Polar regions and was organised, manned and supported primarily by Australians.

The four huts left behind are among the few that remain from a golden era of Antarctic exploration.

The Mawson Huts Foundation said the structures had been cut off for several years because an iceberg codenamed b09b has been blocking the entrance to Commonwealth Bay—named by Mawson—where the huts are located.

The massive iceberg broke away from the Ross Ice Shelf in 2009 and a huge piece of it is now grounded on the ocean bottom.

This prevents the sea ice from breaking up, which obstructs access to the huts by ship.

Godfrey and Tucker will measure the ice thickness in the harbour near the huts for the possible landing of an aircraft from the Casey scientific base on the sea ice during the next few days.

The privately-funded expedition is a joint venture between the Mawson's Huts Foundation and the Australian Antarctic Division with some 30 scientists on the ship who will carry out many of the experiments conducted by the 1911-14 team.

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