

Yarn from Antarctica

What makes a woman in her fifties rent out a portable freezer, set it to minus 18 degrees Celsius, then spend two hours inside fighting frostbite and spinning yarn? And what makes her do the whole thing over, this time in the wilds of Antarctica?

“I missed the snow,” says Canadian-born Australian resident and **OUTBACK** subscriber, Marion Wheatland. When her father died in 2008, he left Marion a sum of money and an instruction to do something extravagant. She decided to visit Sir Douglas Mawson’s base on the Antarctic continent. Having spent much of her life spinning yarn and teaching others to do the same, she wasn’t about to spend idle hours cruising to Antarctica without her spinning wheel. “Then I thought, if I’m going to take my wheel, I may as well do something for someone else, something for history,” Marion says.

Marion decided to create and auction a replica of the blue balaclava Mawson wore while leading the Australian Antarctic Expedition of 1911. She sourced a knitting pattern dating back to 1910 and then set herself the real challenge, which would be to spin yarn for the hat out the front of the Antarctic living quarters that Mawson and his men called home for two years.

To prepare for the climate, which can plummet to -15°C in the summer months, Marion and her spinning wheel journeyed to Mount Hotham, Vic, where wild winds proved a challenge, but temperatures remained at a relatively cosy -5°C . Drastic measures followed, including two hours in a portable freezer and a trip to a Melbourne bar built from 30 tonnes of ice and set at a constant -10°C .

In the end, however, Marion was blessed with what she describes as a “heatwave”, with temperatures hovering at around 0°C . “We also had two days with no wind – it’s just unheard of in Antarctica,” she says. With conditions so good, she was able to spend six hours outside spinning yarn.

Auction proceeds will be donated to Mawson’s Huts Foundation, a group dedicated to preserving Australia’s Antarctic base, which has been left much as it was when Mawson stayed there.

The auction will be held at a dinner in Hobart on December 1, a century since



Under the gaze of a curious onlooker, Marion Wheatland spins yarn outside Sir Douglas Mawson’s base on the Antarctic continent.

Mawson first departed from Tasmania for Antarctica. For information, contact David Jensen on (02) 9321 8242 or david.jensen@mawsons-huts.org.au.

Keep on truckin’

A remarkable remnant of Northern Territory history will get a new lease on life if Darwin resident Brian Manning realises his dream to restore his 1962 Bedford truck.

Brian is leading a campaign to have the truck listed as a heritage object, which would open the way for its restoration under the Northern Territory Heritage Grants Program. He bought the truck in 1964 and used it for his contract carpentry business up and down ‘The Track’, as the Stuart Highway was then known. A union stalwart and founding member of the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights, Brian became a supporter of the campaign for equal pay and working conditions for Aboriginal people, which in 1966 resulted in the Wave Hill Station walk-off, led by Vincent Lingiari and his Gurindji people.

The Gurindji withdrew their labour during the nine-year protest and moved off the station, setting up camp on their traditional lands. Their long and arduous protest was finally settled in 1975 when the traditional owners were granted land

rights and a lease on part of the station by then prime minister, Gough Whitlam.

“Times were very tough in the early days of the strike,” Brian recalls. “We decided to help out by delivering food and supplies to the strikers. They’d have been starved back to the station if they hadn’t received our help.”

Brian drove the Bedford on the first 1200-kilometre return food-run and although he didn’t go on every supply mission, the truck completed 15 journeys until the Gurindji people set up a proper store and collection point for welfare payments. “The first trip took almost two days getting there as the road was crook and the truck was overloaded,” Brian says. “I think we did the last 150 miles [240km] at about 20 miles per hour [30 kilometres per hour] because the corrugations were so bad. Thing was we had to be completely self-sufficient because if we’d broken down or run out of fuel the pastoralists weren’t going to help us out.”

Brian is confident the old Bedford, which is garaged in the old Qantas hanger that serves as the NT Motor Vehicle Enthusiast Club headquarters, can be restored to working condition. “There are various proposals,” he says. “One involves getting young Gurindji people involved in the project.”

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