

SACE Board of South Australia

Sources to accompany the 2018 Modern History examination

SECTION 2: SOURCES ANALYSIS

Refer to the sources on this sheet when answering Question 19.

Australasian Antarctic expedition 1911–14

At the turn of the 20th century the world knew very little about the polar regions. In December 1911 Douglas Mawson, leading geologist at the University of Adelaide and experienced Antarctic explorer, led an expedition to unmapped regions of Antarctica. During 1912 the team established three bases from which to observe and explore the region. On 10 November 1912, Mawson and two colleagues, Mertz and Ninnis, set out to journey across inhospitable terrain. In 1914 Mawson was given a hero’s welcome when he returned to Australia.

SOURCE 1 — An excerpt from an interview that Mawson gave in London in 1911

“You see,” he [Mawson] said, “Australia and New Zealand get their weather from the south. In order to predict it successfully, they must know what the climate is doing on the Antarctic continent. Secondly, there are an enormous number of seals and whales down there from which Australasians might win great gains. Thirdly, there are possibilities of coal and precious metals being found. Fourthly, we shall take very careful magnetic observations, by which we shall help to make the compass more useful to sailors and possibly to clear up what is still the mystery of the earth’s magnetism.

“Primarily our work is to be geographic — that is, mapping. But it has all these practical, material sides to it as well. Looking forward to it? I should rather think I am. Everyone who has been in the Antarctic wants to go back. It’s the healthiest place in the world. Here’s another possibility — health resorts and winter sports on this coast for Australasians. No, I’m not joking. I don’t see why they shouldn’t grow up in that sunny, germ-free atmosphere.”

24 April 1911, ‘Antarctic exploration’, *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, p 12, viewed 15 May 2018, <http://nla.gov.au>

SOURCE 2 — A recount of significant events that occurred during the expedition

During the sledging trip to the east of the base a crevasse swallowed up Ninnis, a team of six dogs, and the sled containing most of their food. The survivors began a brutal journey home ... Mertz died during the return, leaving Mawson the only survivor. He cut his sled in half with a pen knife and dragged the sled with geological specimens but very minimal food 160 km back to the base at Cape Denison. He arrived on February 8, 1913, just hours after the recovery party left on the *Aurora*¹. He and a party of six volunteers who had stayed behind to search for the missing men remained for an unplanned second year.

¹ the ship intended to take the explorers back to Australia

Department of the Environment and Energy 2008, ‘Australasian Antarctic expedition’, viewed 19 March 2018, www.antarctica.gov.au

SOURCE 3 — An artist’s impression of Mawson’s return to Cape Denison



viewed 15 May 2018, www.alamy.com

SOURCE 4 — A newspaper report of speeches given at a reception welcoming Mawson home

... Dr. Mawson had written his name high on the scroll of imperishable renown¹ as a great Australian hero. His courage, fortitude², and endurance were unsurpassed in the whole history of exploration in any age or in any part of the world ... Exploration of this kind [was] not undertaken in any hope of gain or for any petty personal ambition, but chiefly with the purpose of finding out something hitherto³ unknown, and of adding to the sum of human knowledge ...

¹ fame

² courage in pain or difficulty

³ previously

3 March 1914, ‘Mawson honoured: reception at Adelaide’, *The Argus*, Melbourne, viewed 6 August 2018, <https://trove.nla.gov.au>

SOURCE 5 — A current historian’s view of Mawson

Mawson might have sworn off any more polar adventures, but he was hooked. The Antarctic provided him with a challenging environment in which to test his physical stamina, prove his masculinity, and pursue his worldly ambitions. The celebrity he was accorded on his return to Australia was intoxicating ... The experience would leave him with a taste for fame, and a hunger for the fortune and academic promotion that could accompany it.

Day, D 2013, *Flaws in the ice: in search of Douglas Mawson*, Scribe Publications, Brunswick, p 23

SOURCE 6 — An excerpt from Mawson’s obituary¹ at his state funeral² in 1958

Mawson was a man in whom scholarship, leadership and courage were generously combined to make a great Australian. A man of commanding stature, tall and sparsely³ built, modest and somewhat reserved in temperament, yet withal⁴ an impressive personality, he was never carried away by success and he did not lend his support to anything which he did not sincerely believe to be in the interests of scientific knowledge. In his vigour and initiative he typified the best traits of Australian character.

¹ account of the life of a person who has died

² a ceremonial funeral for an important person

³ thinly

⁴ nevertheless

Australian Academy of Science 1958, *Obituary: Douglas Mawson*, viewed 15 May 2018, <https://www.science.org.au/files/userfiles/fellowship/memoirs/documents/mawson.pdf>