



Australian Antarctic Division : Leading Australia's Antarctic Program

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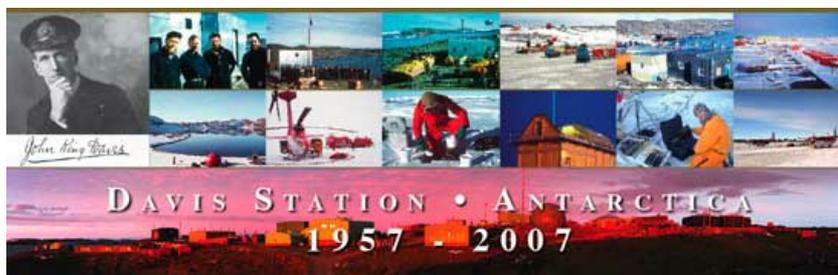
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Davis station 50th anniversary



In January 1957 an Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE) party led by Phil Law aboard *Kista Dan* spent days searching the coast off the Vestfold Hills for a good anchorage and source of fresh water - prerequisites for a new ANARE station planned for the International Geophysical Year. On the 12th January a spur-of-the-moment decision was made, and a small rocky terrace above a black sandy beach was chosen as the site. Unloading began immediately, starting with prefabricated materials for the first hut, and building began.

A small ceremony was held on the 13th January 1957 to officially establish the new station, named Davis, in honour of Captain John King Davis, master of many historic Antarctic ships, including Douglas Mawson's 1911-14 Australasian Antarctic Expedition ship *Aurora*.

Work resumed after the ceremony, and by 20th January *Kista Dan* was able to leave the fledgling station. She sailed west to Mawson, and returned to Davis in February with huskies and an expeditioner.

Bob Dingle, Alan Hawker, Nils Lied, Bill Lucas and Bruce Stinear made up the first party to winter in the Vestfold Hills. The party was not completely isolated, as Beaver aircraft flew between Mawson station (established February 1954) and Davis several times transferring personnel and supplies.

The first two years at Davis were devoted to gathering basic knowledge about the Vestfold Hills - one of the largest ice-free areas in Antarctica - and developing essential station services. Wintering groups were small, numbering only five and four respectively, and for the first seven years no Davis wintering group exceeded ten.

Davis was temporarily closed in January 1965 to allow concentration of the Australian Antarctic Division's resources on the building of Casey station as a replacement for Wilkes (the United States station built for the 1957 International Geophysical Year, and taken over by Australia in 1959). Davis was re-opened on 15th February 1969, and has operated continuously since then.

There are over 300 lakes in the Vestfold Hills, ranging from hypersaline, which never freeze, to freshwater lakes that freeze almost to the bottom during winter. In the 1970s a biology program was begun, studying the lakes' microorganisms. As the program developed, field huts were built at several sites in the Vestfolds, the first being Brookes Hut, built at Long Fjord in 1972.

In the 1980s Davis station was substantially rebuilt as part of the rebuilding program for all Australia's Antarctic stations. Concrete foundations and steel-framed structures with insulated steel wall panels replaced the cramped accommodation of earlier times, with purpose-built laboratories providing scientists with unprecedented facilities and space for their work.

Davis has now become a major Australian Antarctic research centre. It is the hub of investigations into the biology, geology and glaciology of the Lambert Glacier / Amery Ice Shelf region, and the home of a major atmospheric physics program using laser technology to investigate the Antarctic stratosphere.

Davis is the base for aircraft that deploy researchers and equipment to the less-accessible areas of the Vestfold Hills and remote coastal and inland areas beyond, undertaking aerial surveys, and transferring personnel between Mawson, Casey and Davis.

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This page was last modified on 10 January 2007.

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Australian Antarctic Division

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