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# **WAS AUSTRALIAN ANTARCTICA WON FAIRLY?**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the  
Bachelor of Antarctic Studies with Honours at the Institute of  
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November, 2007

## Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any university, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by any person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Noel David Barrett

## Abstract

The *Winning of Australian Antarctica* (A. Grenfell Price) described the Douglas Mawson led British Australian New Zealand Research Expedition (BANZARE) and the contest to claim Antarctic territory ahead of Norway. Norwegian versions of this contest, by Bjarne Aagaard and Hans Bogen, were critical of Mawson and Australia's claim to a sector of Antarctica west to 45° E. By investigating the historical drivers that led Norway and Britain to the contest, this thesis establishes, through the consideration of official documents, the reasons for it and whether or not Australian Antarctica was won fairly.

Norway's inexperience in diplomacy and foreign affairs, after gaining independence from Sweden in 1905, alerted Britain to the value of whaling in the Antarctic region and resulted in Britain annexing territory to create the Falkland Islands Dependencies and the Ross Dependency. As he was restricted by British whaling regulations, the Norwegian whaling magnate Lars Christensen sought territory free of British control. This led to Norway claiming Bouvet Island which the British believed was theirs. Britain, with the stated desire to include the whole of Antarctica in the British Empire, formulated processes to achieve this in Eastern Antarctica at the 1926 Imperial Conference in London. The process was specifically developed to thwart attempts by other nations to claim the same territory. This was achieved by omitting vital geographic coordinates from the published conference summary, an omission that favoured the BANZARE in proclaiming territory from 45° E to 160° E for Britain. To remove a possible Norwegian challenge for the territory, Britain agreed to relinquish its claim to Bouvet Island in return for Norwegian recognition of British hegemony in Antarctica.

Based on primary documents, Australian Antarctica was acquired directly as a result of Britain's desire to include the whole of Antarctica in the Empire. The process by which this was achieved was legal according to international law of

the period. This thesis has concluded that the process was unfair in only one major aspect, in that it failed to publicly specify the geographical limits of the territory of interest to the British. Taking this into account, and the legality and fairness of the remainder of the process, its implementation and the views expressed by the Norwegian Government, Australian Antarctica was not won, but acquired fairly.

## Acknowledgments

I am indebted to numerous people who have made it possible for me to complete this work. My sincere thanks go to my supervisors, Associate Professor Marcus Howard for his continued and enthusiastic support that boosted my confidence when I needed it and to Dr. John Gibson, for the inspired suggestion to examine the role of Norwegians in Antarctica and his continued support with snippets of additional Norwegian information. I am particularly indebted to my Norwegian friend Mr. Tor Skjellaug, who kindly agreed to translate sections of Bjarne Aagaard's *Fangst of Forskning I Sydishavet* and to the Australian Antarctic Division library staff: Dr. Andie Smithies, Mr. Graham Watt and Ms. Meredith Inglis for their assistance in sourcing the very documents I needed. I am very appreciative of the help provided by Hank Broolsma (Australian Antarctic Division), with maps of Antarctica and Dr. Elizabeth Freeman (School of History and Classics) in establishing a method for footnoting the references from Bush. My thanks are extended to the staff of IASOS and my fellow Honours students for their help, humour and friendship. Finally to my wife Ricki, for understanding my need to study and proof reading the final copy in a way only a teacher could and our dog Daisy whose demand for walks cleared my mind and opened the way to fresh ideas.

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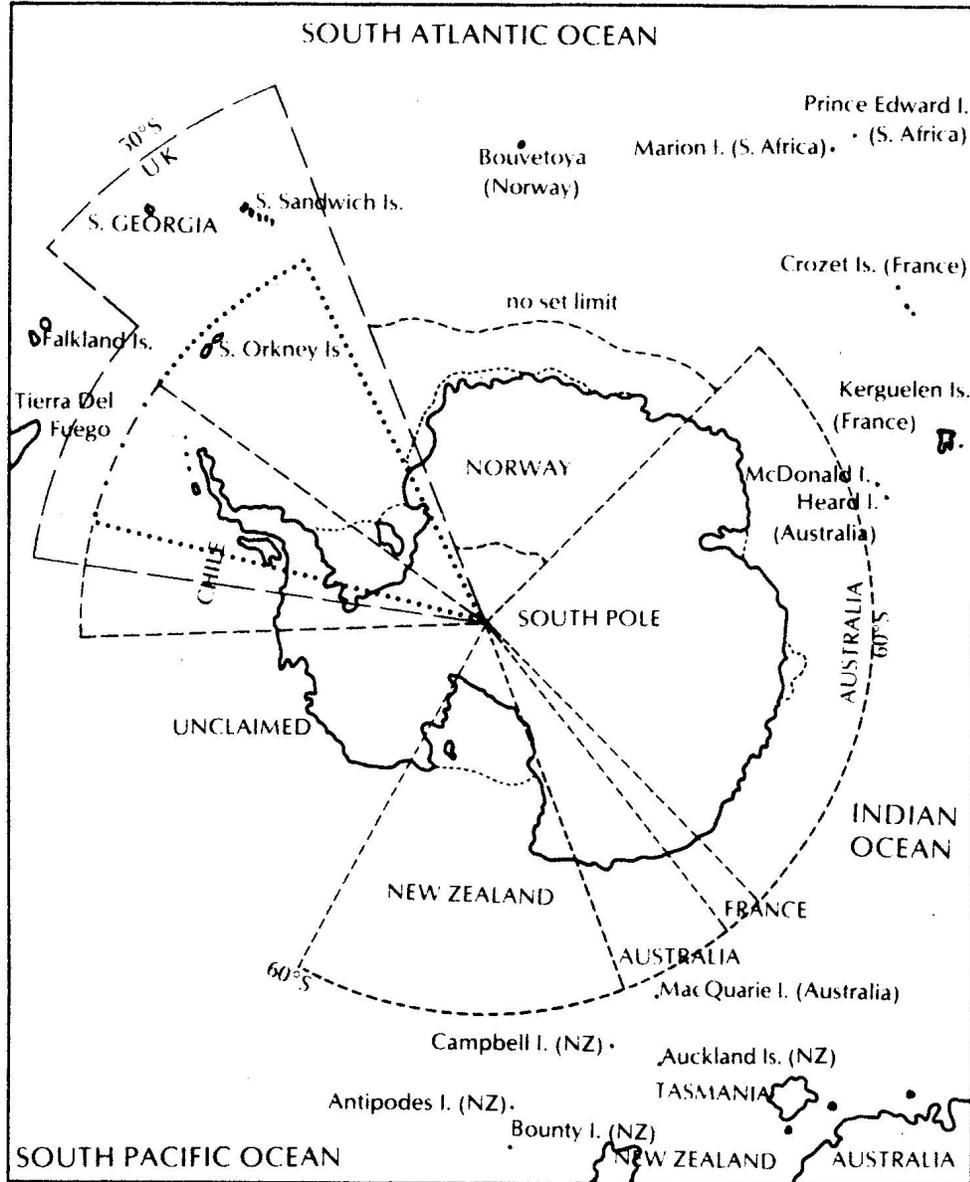
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## Abbreviations

AAE	Australasian Antarctic Expedition
AAT	Australian Antarctic Territory
BANZARE	British Australian New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition
BFO	British Foreign Office
FID	Falkland Islands Dependencies

# Map 1 - Antarctica and Sub-Antarctic Islands



Source: B. Brewster, *Antarctica: Wilderness at risk*, (Sydney, 1982) p. 33.

Map 1

Antarctica and Sub-Antarctic Islands

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 1933 Australia formally acquired sovereignty over territory in Antarctica, territory that had been claimed by Britain in pursuit of their policy to include the whole of Antarctica within the British Empire. Britain, the second largest whaling nation after Norway, had a strategic interest in controlling whaling. Control was necessary to ensure that the wealth that could be gained from the harvesting of the resource remained within the British Empire. Whale oil was not only the source of fat (margarine) for a fat starved post-war Europe, but also the source of glycerine, an essential item in the manufacture of explosives and therefore of strategic importance. Britain had a vital interest in maintaining stocks and controlling Norway, their larger rival in this industry and in so doing reaping additional wealth from the royalties paid by Norwegian whalers. To this end Britain had annexed Antarctic territory to form the Falkland Islands Dependencies in 1908 and the Ross Dependency in 1923. In pursuit of further Antarctic territory Britain was aided by Australia, which was still subject to British Foreign Policy, and Australian explorers.<sup>1</sup>

The principal Australian explorer involved in the acquisition of what was to become the Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT) was Sir Douglas Mawson, who had led the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) in 1911. Mawson's role in the acquisition of Australia's Antarctic Territory is the prime subject of A. Grenfell Price's *The Winning of Australian Antarctica*.<sup>2, 1</sup> This book is based on Mawson's papers leading up to, and including, the British Australian New Zealand Antarctic Research Expeditions (BANZARE), which took place between October 1929 and March 1931. These expeditions were touted as being scientific, and indeed they were, but this was not the primary motive for their undertaking. As will be shown, the primary motive and function of the voyages, particularly the first, was to formally claim territory for Britain.

The evocative title "*The Winning of Australian Antarctica*" suggests the territory gained by Australia in 1933 had been won in a contest. Price talks of the "battle which Mawson

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<sup>1</sup> The foreign policy of Britain continued to be rigidly adhered to by Australia until 1942 when Prime Minister Curtin recalled Australian forces to defend Australia and with the adoption of Statute of Westminster. (S. Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 192.)

<sup>2</sup> End notes are denoted in italic numerals.

fought for Britain and Australia.”<sup>3</sup> Swan, whom Price used as a key source for his non-Mawson material, has a chapter headed “Eyes South! Australia Returns to the Attack.”<sup>4</sup> Was this a battle with the formidable elements of Antarctica or an attack on a rival nation seeking Antarctic territory? It was the latter. Norway, Britain’s whaling rival, was seeking Antarctic territory free from British control in which to continue whaling. The initial rhetoric from Price and Swan suggest it was a battle, when in fact it was a contest led by Britain to claim Antarctic territory ahead of the Norwegians; a race for territory that included the territory Mawson had referred to in 1919, when he said, “I think that we might fairly claim that the section of the Antarctic between 90° and 180°E should be under the control of Australia.”<sup>5</sup> Was, as Mawson suggested, this territory to be acquired fairly? Was the contest with Norway fair?

Indeed was Australian Antarctica won fairly? To answer this question it is necessary to define the meaning of ‘fairly’ to be applied in this thesis. *The Macquarie Dictionary* defines fairly as “in a fair manner, justly, impartially, properly, legitimately” and fair is defined as “free from bias, dishonesty or injustice.”<sup>6</sup> In this work ‘fairly’ is interpreted as having a meaning similar to the colloquial ‘fair-play’, that is “action conforming to the generally accepted ideas of what is fair or acceptable in competition” where what is acceptable is just, impartial, proper and legitimate.<sup>7</sup> Based on these definitions and taking into account *The Winning of Australian Antarctica*, this thesis will explore the means by which Australia won Antarctic territory and will establish whether or not it was ‘won’ fairly in the contest with Norway.

In doing this the thesis will take into account the views of the Norwegian historians Bjarne Aagaard<sup>2</sup> and Hans Bogen,<sup>3</sup> whom Price cites as a reason for the publication of *The Winning of Australian Antarctica* as they “had given their versions of the story and claimed

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<sup>3</sup> A. G. Price, *The Winning of Australian Antarctica* (Sydney, 1962), p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> R. A. Swan, *Australia in the Antarctic* (Melbourne, 1961), pp. 181-206.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Argus, 30 April 1919’ as cited in Swan *Australia in Antarctica*, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> *The Macquarie Dictionary* (Revised Edition), (Dee Why, 1985), p. 631.

<sup>7</sup> *The Macquarie Dictionary* (Revised Edition), (Dee Why, 1985), p. 631.

for Norway the discovery and naming of lands, coasts, and other features, on grounds which in certain instances were doubtful and in others invalid.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Price, *The Winning of Australian Antarctica*, p. vii.