

Hillary Honored at New South Pole Station

Compiled By Billy-Ace Baker

The new base at the geographic South Pole took 10 years and \$220 million to build but when the flag was hoisted at the official opening, it was raised only to half-mast—in memory of Sir Edmund Hillary.

New Zealanders and Americans came together to remember Sir Edmund Hillary at a memorial service in Antarctica. Father Tom O'Connor, of New Zealand, conducted the service at the Chapel of the Snows at McMurdo Station, on Sunday 13 January. Antarctica New Zealand representative Dean Peterson says it was a small ceremony attended by a handful of scientists at midday. He says a eulogy was held and those present reminisced about Sir Edmund's visits to Antarctica.

Sir Edmund died of a heart attack at Auckland City Hospital at 9am on Friday 10 January 2008 (NZT), aged 88. He had been ill for some time.

Sir Edmund Hillary, the New Zealand beekeeper-turned-mountaineer is best known for his conquest of Mount Everest. With his Sherpa guide on 29 May 1953, he became the first known man to climb the world's tallest peak.

The newly-crowned Queen Elizabeth II knighted Hillary. His triumph over Everest also came to symbolize for many Britons a postwar era of prosperity, even as its empire was shrinking.

Hillary went on to adventures in India and Antarctica and became a globetrotting advocate of environmentalism and conservationism.

On 21 January 1958, Sir Vivian Fuchs and Sir Edmund Hillary met at South Pole Station amid a worldwide blaze of controversy. It was the half-way point of the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition's first successful crossing of the Frozen Continent—but Hillary's team made a "hell-bent dash to the Pole" beating Fuchs and his team by five weeks.

Sir Edmund called it "a jaunt" when recounting his decision to dash 400 miles, "hell-bent for the South Pole—God willing and crevasses permitting" rather than wait around, 9,400 feet up on the Polar Plateau for the British party led by Dr (later Sir) Vivian Fuchs.

Hillary's most shattering experience was the loss of his wife, Louise Rose Hillary, and their teenage daughter, Belinda, in a plane crash near Katmandu, Nepal, in 1975. They were flying to meet Hillary at a Nepalese outpost called Phaphlu, where he was helping build a hospital.

In 1989, Sir Ed married June Mulgrew, the widow of Hillary's climbing partner, Peter Mulgrew, who had died in a plane crash on Mount Erebus a decade earlier.

Hillary was also supposed to have been on the flight but canceled at the last minute.

Besides his second wife, survivors include two children from his first marriage, Peter and Sarah.

Hillary wrote many books about his travels, including *High Adventure* (1955), about the scaling of Everest, and *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win* (1975), a memoir.

Hillary's body was cremated at a private service and his ashes scattered at sea.

Dave Bresnahan long time NSF Representative Antarctica remembers hosting Sir Ed numerous times during his visits to McMurdo. Dave recalls the following story:

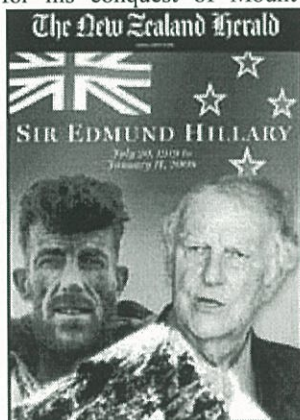
A couple years ago Sir Ed gave a talk at McMurdo. After he got through the canned remarks, he started telling stories and it was magic. At the end, he was getting up to leave, pulling on his coat he got this twinkle in his eye and shared one more. He was flying on a small RNZAF plane from Scott Base doing recon for his trip to Pole. On the way back he had to pee but the pilots were not allowed to land anywhere but the runway at McMurdo. But Ed was able to coerce the young pilot to land. They bumped across the snow and came to a stop next to a crevasse. They jumped out of the plane and, Ed explained to the crowd listening at McMurdo in his very formal and proper British English, "They relieved themselves". The audience took a few seconds to process Ed's words until an image of Sir Ed pissing into the crevasse formed in their minds-eye, and the entire crowd roared. It was a great Antarctic picture that we could all relate too.

OAEA Life Member Bill Sladen wrote about his encounters with Sir Ed: I met Sir Ed for the first time in the 1960s when he visited Cape Crozier, Ross Island, Antarctica where my Johns Hopkins University team was studying the Adelie Penguin.

The second visit was in March 1991 when I had the honor of sitting next to him in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York at the *Explorers Club* Annual Meeting when I received *The Explorers Medal* for research in Antarctica and the Arctic.

The third time was at a reception for him in 1999 in DC when he was a guest of the *Antarctican Society* and *Explorers Club, DC Group*. He was giving a lecture at the Smithsonian.

When I met him for the fourth time, just a year ago, almost to a day of his death, in January 2007 at McMurdo he was quite frail but in mind fantastically alert and full of fun. He was with his son Peter, and a host of US and NZ VIPs who were there celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of NZs Scott Base—Sir Ed was the first OIC of Scott Base. At that time, I had just returned to



McMurdo from the Adelie Penguin colony at Cape Royds. Dr. Dave Ainley and film maker Lloyd Fales wanted shots of me for NSF's DVD *Penguin Science* that has now been distributed to over 1,000 schools.

Editor's Note: The video was shown on TV on the Animal Plant channel, with a new title: Return to Penguin City, on 23 March 2008.

In the Washington Post's obituary there is a reference to Ed's "friendly" competition with Bunny Fuchs (Sir Vivian) the leader of the *Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, 1955-58*. I knew Fuchs pretty well because he was our leader when I first sailed South as medical officer and biologist in 1947 with the *Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey* (now *British Antarctic Survey*). Like mine, it was Fuch's first Antarctic visit. I loudly cheered Sir Ed when he beat Fuchs to the pole by 15 days in January 1958 from the Ross Sea using a modified farm tractor, eating eggs and bacon while Fuchs from the Weddell Sea side of Antarctica was eating pemmican and traveling mostly by snow-cat as well as dog-sledge—the Scott/Shackleton way! Yes, they both had aircraft support. It was Ed Hillary, not Fuchs as planned, who was the first to reach the South Pole on land by a motorized vehicle.

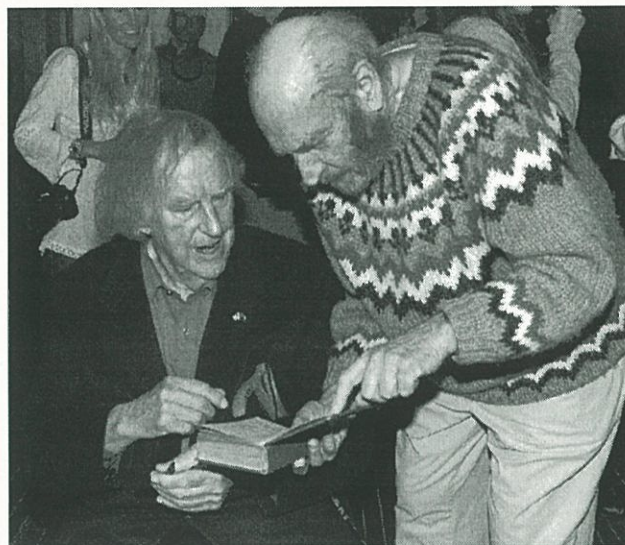
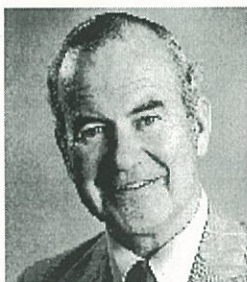


Photo by Peter Rejcek Antarctic Sun
Sir Ed, seated, looks on as Bill Sladen points out Ed's 1960 signature in his copy of Cherry Garrard's *Worst Journey in the World* about Edward Wilson's winter journey to Cape Crozier in 1912 to collect Emperor Penguin eggs for the London Natural History Museum.

OAEA Life Member Bob Thompson

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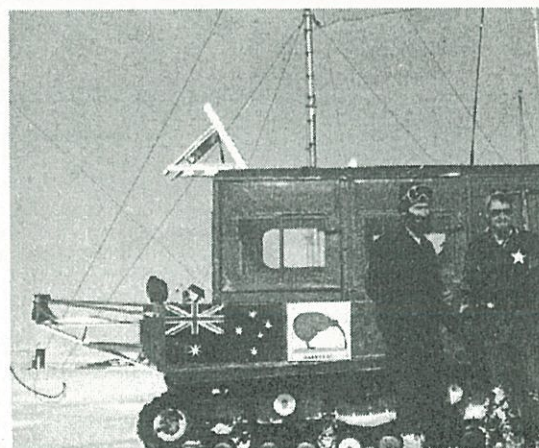
Robert Baden Thomson, 80, of Moneta, Virginia, died Thursday, 3 January 2008, at his residence. He was born 18 May 1927, in New Zealand. He moved to the United States in the early 1990s. Bob was a Life Member of the OAEA and a member of the New Zealand Antarctic Society.



He was a retired Director of the New Zealand Antarctic Division, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR). Bob began his long Antarctic career as an IGY radio operator and electronics technician on the sub-Antarctic Campbell Island. When he applied to be an upper atmosphere physicist at jointly run (US-NZ) Hallett Station, he was appointed scientific leader in 1960, followed by a summer as leader at New Zealand's Scott Base, and again in 1963 and 1964. He wintered over in 1962 as scientific leader of the joint Australian-United States Wilkes Station. He led the first successful uncharted 120-day, 900-mile Antarctic plateau over-snow expedition, traversing from Wilkes Station to Vostok Station and back. The traverse consisted of Bob, four Australians members, and one American. Navigating by sunshots plotted on graph paper, he arrived precisely on target without mishap, experiencing the coldest temperatures

that man has ever known. For that accomplishment, in June 1964, Bob was awarded the OBE by Queen Elizabeth II.

Editor's Note: According to his book, The Coldest Place on Earth, they used "smoke and mirrors" for navigation. See photo below.



Thomson and Foster after their return to Wilkes Station. Thomson's ingenious mirror navigational system is mounted above the cab

Bob was the Director of New Zealand's Antarctic Research Program from 1965 to 1988. In 1968, he established Vanda Station in the Dry Valleys. During that