

A New Australian breed? - the Anaree Dog

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ANARE (pronounced ANN-ARE-EE) is the ab-breviated name given to the Australian National Antarctic Expeditions. The government Department of Science and Technology (Antarctic Division) sends expeditions annually to its bases on the Antarctic mainland at Casey, Davis, and Mawson and to the islands of Macquarie and Heard.

Dogs have been kept by the Australian expeditioners on a continuous basis since 1950. Their introduction involved an intriguing breach of quarantine regulations.

The story starts in 1944 when the British took 36 sledge dogs from Labrador to their new Antarctic Peninsula bases. In 1947 several of these dogs were taken back to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands. The Governor there, knowing of Australia's growing interest in re-establishing bases, offered three teams of these trained dogs to the authorities. The problem of getting the dogs to Australia from the Falklands and then into Australia, by-passing the rigidly enforced quarantine regulations, appeared insurmountable. Negotiations dragged on for over 12 months.

Then a third party came onto the scene. In 1948, twenty of the Falkland dogs were returned to England where they were promptly given to the French who were planning their own southern expedition. The French had also acquired 15 Greenland Huskies and from these two packs, thirty huskies left France in November 1948 aboard the ship 'Commandant Charcot'. Led by a M. Liotard, its purpose was to establish a base in Adelie Land.

Pack ice can always be a problem, but in 1948-49 it proved to be impenetrable and the 'Commandant Charcot' retreated to Australia in February 1949. The French requested Australia to allow the dogs to remain in the country. This would save returning them to France only to subject them to a third long sea voyage in the following year.

The Australian Department of Quarantine and Health was adamant: "the landing of dogs from the Commandant Charcot is therefore out of the question."

M. Liotard even enlisted the enthusiastic aid of Sir Douglas Mawson, then at Adelaide University, but to no apparent avail. Things looked grim until the Director of the Antarctic Division, Phillip Law, came up with the proposition that the Melbourne Zoo would be prepared to accept custody of the dogs.

"With the stipulation that the dogs go direct from ship to zoo, and never leave except for shipment south, the quarantine people capitulated."

By agreement, pups born during the year plus any adult dogs not required by the French, became the property of Australia.

January 1950 saw a team of 12 huskies being sent to the Australian base on Heard Island. Of this number only two were originally from Greenland, the remainder having been bred at the zoo and were a mixture of the Greenland and Labrador (husky) types. Harbottle, Zoe, Thurber, Shiela, Pat, Willi, Boopus, Martan, Trevor, Buster, Judy and Phil thus sailed into history.

The following year saw an additional 16 dogs arrive at Heard Island and the remainder were sent at a later date.

"At Heard Island the dogs did valuable haulage work around the station...in winter pulling sledges and in summer a 'dogomobile' (wheeled cart). The prime objective was to gain expertise in dogteam management and maintain training for the dogs (and men) for their eventual destination further south." When Mawson station went into operation on 17th February 1954, 30 huskies joined the men who were to be the first to winter there and in doing so finally arrived in their true setting.

Since that time the initial stock has been added to by three Greenland huskies and occasional new blood from either the New Zealand or British teams on the southern continent.

Nowadays the only Australian base to have dogs is Mawson where approximately 25 dogs are kept. This provides two teams of 9, plus young and breeding stock. Breeding is strictly regulated and proper records are kept. In order to keep numbers down, litters are culled and, when necessary, older dogs put down.

A detailed 'Anare Dog Drivers Manual' is provided for new expeditioners. Its author, Rod Ledingham, states in the introduction that it is:

"Intended as a practical manual for the care and running of the Mawson station dogs...in some areas it is most important that expeditioners use the same techniques to ensure that the dogs are able to be driven safely and efficiently by different drivers."

From the demands of Australia's Antarctic expeditions a new type of workdog has evolved

With Mr Ledingham's permission I have quoted several sections from this manual. It covers not only the everyday care of the dogs but gives instruction on mating, whelping, training, problem areas, commands used, sledge making, correct types of harness, how to deal with emergencies in the field and a host of other detail and advice.

After 34 years, the general type and character of the dogs is well mixed but it is worth noting the comments of a French dogman (M. Pommier) in the late 1940s

